



The Search for Heinrich Schlögel

Martha Baillie

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Martha Baillie's hypnotic novel follows Heinrich Schlögel from Germany to Canada, where he sets out on a two-week hike into the isolated interior of Baffin Island. His journey quickly becomes surreal; he experiences strange encounters and inexplicable visions as shards of Arctic history emerge from the shifting landscape. When he returns from his hike, he discovers that, though he has not aged, thirty years have passed.

Narrated by an unnamed archivist who is attempting to piece together the truth of Heinrich's life, *The Search for Heinrich Schlögel* dances between reality and dream, asking us to consider not only our role in imagining the future into existence but also the consequences of our past choices.

The Search for Heinrich Schlögel Details

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Author : Martha Baillie

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From Reader Review The Search for Heinrich Schlägel for online ebook

Christine says

It was no surprise to me that this was an original novel, because Martha has an original mind. This novel is meta but in an original and elegant way. Fowles may have been one of the innovators of that form in the French Lieutenant's Woman but Baillie takes it to a new level.

When the novel opens, we meet the eponymous Heinrich, and gradually come to know that he has an eccentric, agoraphobic, brilliant sister. Heinrich is a bit of a mystery to the reader as well as the unnamed archivist who brings us his story, and that's the one of the engines Baillie uses to compel the story (in addition to the mystery of the lost time itself). Who is Heinrich Schlägel? How can she come to understand what propelled him across the Atlantic to Baffin Island, and of what happened to him there? How well can any author of any text know the characters in it?

The novel follows his journey to the Canadian North, and the fateful two-week hiking trip that deposits him on the other side of a 30-year-gap that he can neither escape nor understand. The archivist tries to retrace his footsteps to better understand these facts, and slyly reveals the sort of things that creep into a fiction: a fabric in a window becomes the curtain material in his home (p 48), a "real" photograph that might have inspired the entire story (appendix), a dream about a fish-processing plant (p163). She alludes to the myriad decisions a novelist makes in the construction of a world: "How did they get from the sidewalk into the café? Who led, who followed? Did they walk quickly or slowly?" (p 218)

Throughout, she threads a novelist's anxieties via the archivist's: for existential validation ("How do I define pleasure? The search for, and wondrous discovery of, each new artifact? Decipher, elaborate, speculate, turn upside down, reconsider, arrange, classify? Am I leading an irresponsible life, given how little time is left?... But what if my search leads successfully to Heinrich?", p91), and to find the true story in the one she's making ("That is the best story, Inge: your desire for my happiness. That is the story I'm selecting as the truth." p 122)

And then there's the matter of the archivist's search for him, and her painstaking inquiry into the animal that is Heinrich of Tettnang. Reviewers have suggested that this is Baillie turning the tables, anthropologically speaking: a European who came to Inuit territory is being examined, rather than the other way around. I don't doubt that was her intention.

Her final chapter, an appendix, is a "debrief" that purports to describe the photograph that inspired the fiction. She made me Google search for it. The final laugh is her own. Does the photograph exist, or not?

Valerie says

I usually avoid magical realism as a genre; nevertheless, our book club selected this novel which was mesmerizing. There are so many levels of discovery from Heinrich's fascination with recreating a journey to the arctic to his sister Inge's linguistic abilities to his father's walks and love of Schiller. The trip to Canada takes a different route, but is one that is stark, beautiful, horrifying, and most magical. Heinrich, like Rip Van

Winkle, loses thirty years as he enters the wilderness in the late seventies and re-enters the world of the twenty-first century. Who knew so much had happened---especially technology. Most of all there are infinite lessons in Baillie's book---especially from the Inuit characters past and present. Worthy selection and worth another read.

Ernesto says

Talk about serendipity. I ran across this book when it was given away as an ARC at BEA this year. And although you are not supposed to judge a book for its cover, it was the cover that prompted me to put the book on top of my to-read pile of ARCs.

It has been one of the most pleasurable readings in a long time. Is certainly the first book where I was able to admire the beauty of the English language.

Baillie has crafted sentences, paragraphs and chapters where the reader is unable to detach him/herself of the characters, not even their surroundings.

It was not the story, but the *way it was told*, that I enjoyed the most. Several examples come to mind, but I would like to cite this one:

The complete absence of trees in no way bothered him. He felt disloyal, however, for not missing the presence of trees. Surely it was ungrateful of him to forget about them so easily? He tried to remember all that trees have given him - shelter from the wet, the pleasurable sound of leaves rustling, the relief of shade, the beauty of dappled light. His efforts met with resistance. If he conjured a general idea of a tree, it felt unconvincing. If he started to recall a particular tree, one he knew well, its presence became too real and intruded.

From this, you can easily feel the anguish of Heinrich over such a trivial issue as missing trees in a hike.

As always with books that I enjoyed reading, the ending fails to keep up with the rest of the book. It even contradicts what was stated at the beginning of the book. (view spoiler)

However, these qualms do not lessen my appreciation of this book. It was wonderfully written and it left me with a sensation of loss now that it is over.

Lauren Davis says

An experimental bit of surrealism, an unreliable narrator, a scatter of post-modernist technique (puzzles and scraps of information and footnotes, for example), some magical realism... stirred into a pot of mythology and time travel. The result? A confused reader -- one open to, indeed hoping for, clarity.

Anyone?

From Jade Colbert at the Globe & Mail: "At the heart of Martha Baillie's fragmentary, highly original new

novel is an inexplicable event. In 1980, at age 20, Heinrich Schlägel escapes his West German birthplace to hike Baffin Island's interior. The trip lasts two weeks, but when he returns the year is 2010 and he has not aged a day. His biography, the one we read, comes to us via an amateur archivist (also German, transplanted in Toronto) who has compiled "the Schlägel archive": letters, photographs, books read, and other bits of ephemera related to the young man. How much of the story is the archivist's invention? The use of an unreliable narrator has a point here: Baillie is turning the tables on the European, who has taken the place usually held by the "native" as specimen of study. The result is a philosophic, absorbing read on photography, the North, colonialism, ethnography, and the nature of time."

From the back of the book:

"The story of a young man who escapes the claustrophobia of small-town Germany by travelling to Canada, where he sets out on a long solo hike into the interior of Baffin Island. Soon time begins to play tricks on him. Yanked from the twentieth century and deposited in the twenty-first, Heinrich lands in a disorienting, digital Present where a computer-nimble Pangnirtung teenager befriends him. She lives with her grandmother who rents Heinrich a room. "Capacious, capricious, mischievous, The Search for Heinrich Schlägel moves like a quantum experiment, defying boundaries of time, place, chronology. Fluid as light itself, animated by startling imagery, vivid and peculiar characters, The Search for Heinrich Schlägel is a hymn to brooding memory, the enduring need to inhabit story, and a haunting insistence upon endless possibilities within possibility. That is to say, hope." --Gina Ochsner, author of *The Russian Dreambook of Color and Flight*"

Well, somehow those reviewers got more from the book than did I. At a sentence level, beautifully written (hence the three stars) and many of the passages describing the actual solo hike are mesmerizing, however, I found the archivist's passages more trick than literary nourishment and her obsession as inexplicable as the amount of material she's able to collect and the conclusions she draws are incredible.

Then there's that ending. It's not an ending at all really. The novel simply comes to an abrupt stop. I was left full of unanswered questions and perplexed by symbols that appeared suddenly and without explanation on the last few pages. I had the feeling throughout that I was supposed to be approaching a profound epiphany of the type Ochsner clearly experienced when she wrote her blurb of the book, and I admit I fear I have failed somehow. I would be delighted if someone would explain to me what I've missed here.

I'm usually quite good at deciphering meaning, but I'm blank on this one.

Beth Follett says

Sustained meaning in an exquisitely realized and utterly original novel. I say this as a reader, not Martha's publisher, though I'm that, too.

Jo says

Fascinating, interesting novel that fell a bit short of wrapping up its promise in the last 15 pages, but still highly recommended.

Steve says

It's hard to find a way to articulate what I liked so much about this novel, and why it was so powerful, beyond saying it just sounds at a pitch that resonates with me. It's a novel that provokes questions about loneliness and isolation, and about the desire to leave home or explore or pursue or dreams whatever they may be, and how those single-minded pursuits — even when successful — might untether us forever from who we were and the world we belonged to. Putting it that sounds very metaphysical and vague, but what makes this novel so good is that it *isn't* vague, it's specific without getting trapped in a sense of being allegory and it's literal without being bland "realism." Which again doesn't really say much, I guess, so just read the book, please.

Patrick says

I loved this book on several levels. I felt I could have written it. I could be the protagonist. I have interests that are close to most of the main characters, and I have felt and seen imagery described.

The plot is simple, at first. The narrator, who is unnamed, becomes obsessed by a photo of a young man that was taken on a street in Toronto. She (I believe the narrator is female) begins a quest to locate the man in the picture, Heinrich Schlogel. This Mr. Schlogel is German. Slowly, we find his character fill out and the narrative progresses. He is fascinated with the Canadian arctic and begins planning a trip to follow in the footsteps of an arctic explorer, Samuel Hearne.

He makes it to Canada and after several detours, begins his walk into the wilderness. This is where things get dicey. This is where magical realism takes over. Something (I will not mention what) happens to Heinrich Schlogel during his solo hike.

The storyline takes some very interesting turns after he emerges from the wilds. Now, he begins a search for his sister, who has moved to Canada from Germany.

To say anymore about the plot now would be to reveal spoilers. I'm not going to do that. Read this book and become transported to a different reality and experience something mystical. I have seen remote sub-arctic regions and felt the same feelings of powerlessness in the face of "the void."

I only finished the book last night and already I can see several interpretations of what happened and the true meaning of the novel.

Tuck says

be sure and see the audio/visual archive/portrayal of heinrich schloger

<http://schlogel.ca/>

it is a stunning effort and worth it in itself to read and view and listen

book is about a young german man who strives toward his dream of 'exploring' the arctic with literary and literally strange results.

for readers who have it all.

Anne says

I felt that I was reading this book underwater. It is surreal and hypnotic. The story of Heinrich Schlogel is told by an anonymous narrator who nonetheless shares much of her own relationship with her parents. The book is about family, separation and the passage of time. Heinrich and his familial relationships are foremost in the story but we see also those of the narrator and of the Inuit people he or his sister Inge encounter both personally and in history. It is lovely to read but has only questions , no answers.

Daphne says

This is book is just one of those ones that a person has to read for themselves to fully experience it. It follows the life of Heinrich as he embarks on an amazing journey. Growing up feeling claustrophobic he finds a direction to strive for when his sister Inge gives him a book on the journeys of Samuel Hearne in the Canadian Arctic. Once he embarks on his journey he has no idea how it would come to take place.

The story is a story written from the view of an archivist who discovers a photograph of Heinrich and has a compulsive curiosity to discover his story and where he came to be. While telling the story you discover just a glimpse of what it is like when a historian discovers one tiny tidbit and runs with it developing an entire story, and the lengths they go to discover new evidence.

A very good read although I would like to point out that it would not be for someone looking for an easy going read.

Joseph Romain says

Freaking brilliant. A slow start is flushed from memory by skillful writing and a sense of normalcy in stark contrast to the tale told. Too much to say, mustn't give any away. Read it.

Magdelanye says

This dreamlike tale within a tale is a story of the nature of obsession and its displacement.

Within this fantasy is jarring reality, the crushing loneliness and the cold, and a community that has the power to restore life.

Shannon Rochester says

I entered this contest precisely because this is the type of book I might not pick out for myself...I am really glad I won, though, because I enjoyed the book a lot. Until I got to the end, which really left too much open

for me. But the book kept me engaged the whole way through.

Beth Follett says

Many people believe that as Martha Baillie's publisher I cannot possibly give an objective account of her work, being too invested in its sales outcome. I disagree. Recently on Facebook, friends have been listing their top ten books, and each time I see one of these lists I want to make my own present-day list, which would include Martha's new novel, ***The Search for Heinrich Schloegl.*** The work is so masterfully created, so utterly original and so perfectly fitting to the spirit of our time. I have read it at least eight times, and each time I am thrust into the deepest kind of reading pleasure, by which I mean: thinking, sailing, wondering, worrying: the promises of literary fiction delivered again and again and again. I have read this book closely, carefully, openly. As American author Howard Norman has already said, I too must say: Martha's novel is a masterpiece.
