About the Author

Full text biography:

Derek B. Miller

Place of Birth: United States, Massachusetts, Boston

Nationality: American

Occupation: Novelist

Table of Contents:

Personal Information
Career
Writings
Sidelights
Related Information

Personal Information:


Career Information:

International affairs specialist and novelist. Policy Lab, Boston, MA, director and founding partner. Senior fellow, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and the Center for Communication for Sustainable Social Change, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; associate scholar, Center for Local Strategies Research, University of Washington; guest lecturer, Oslo School of Architecture and Design.

Writings:

- (With Daniel Ladouceur and Zoe Dugal) From Research to Road Map: Learning from the Arms for Development Initiative in Sierra Leone (nonfiction), United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (Geneva, Switzerland), 2006.
- Norwegian by Night (novel), Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (Boston, MA), 2013.

Contributor of articles to scholarly journals.

Sidelights:

Derek B. Miller is an international affairs specialist who serves as the director and founding partner of the Policy Lab, an international policy design institute, and as a senior fellow with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. With over fifteen years' experience in security affairs, Miller has written several scholarly articles in his areas of expertise. He also has published books, including From Research to Road Map: Learning from the Arms for Development Initiative in Sierra Leone, which was written with Daniel Ladouceur and Zoe Dugal; Media Pressure on Foreign Policy: The Evolving Theoretical Framework; and The Security Needs Assessment Protocol: Improving Operational Effectiveness through Community Security, which he wrote with Lisa Rudnick.
He crossed over to the world of fiction with his novel *Norwegian by Night*, which was published in 2013. The protagonist of the story is Sheldon Horowitz, an eighty-two-year-old widower with prostate problems and possible dementia. Sheldon, who is still haunted by his experiences during the Korean War and the death of his son in Vietnam, left New York to live with his granddaughter and her husband in Oslo, Norway, at her urging. After a young woman is murdered in their apartment building, Sheldon is able to make off with her young son and sets out to get the boy to safety. The killer, however, is a ruthless Kosovar war criminal, and Sheldon must use his decades-old sniper training to elude the killer.

"Miller's affecting debut ... is an unusual hybrid: part memory novel, part police procedural, part sociopolitical tract and part existential meditation," remarked a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor. "Miller is funny and touching and irreverent and yet respectful of his characters and his readers. He considers age and the toll that grief and guilt can take on a life, on the cultural differences between Norway and New York, the stresses that immigration brings to Scandinavian countries that have both a sense of social duty and inexperience with cultural difference," reported a reviewer for the *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* Web site. When the story "takes off at a gallop you can't turn the pages fast enough," concluded the reviewer. *New York Times Book Review* contributor Susannah Meadows had high praise for Miller's novel, noting that "this charming debut has the brains of a literary novel and the body of a thriller." *Norwegian by Night* is "both an exciting chase thriller and a poignant story about a man who comes into his own again" in his old age, stated David Keymer in a review of the novel for *Library Journal*. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer commented on how humorous episodes "enliven the narrative," concluding that *Norwegian by Night* "works better as a study in character than a crime novel."

In an article for the London *Telegraph Online*, Miller, who is often asked in interviews whether his writing takes him away from his important "day job," wrestled with the importance of both his jobs and the role that storytelling plays in each: "I am now less concerned with the breakdown between fiction and nonfiction or the essential value or frivolousness of my two professions. Instead, I'm now more interested in the underlying virtue of telling stories to reach and share understandings of value. Stories seem to be vehicles for different kinds of truths, a conclusion which does not provide any answers, I suppose, but does pose a better question: What can I learn from a story?"

**Related Information:**

**PERIODICALS**


**ONLINE**

- *Telegraph Online*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/ (March 20, 2013), Derek B. Miller, "Derek B. Miller: Is It Frivolous to Be a Novelist?"

**Source:** *Contemporary Authors Online*, 2014

**Gale Database:** Contemporary Authors Online

**Gale Document Number:** GALE[H22299018]

Norwegian by Night
by Derek B. Miller

1. At the end of Chapter 17, Sheldon tells young Rhea that “being conceived in indifference but raised in love is better than the inverse.” Discuss the family ties that are woven throughout NORWEGIAN BY NIGHT. How do they compare to the bonds experienced in your own family?

2. The novel is shaped by generations of warfare, from Hitler’s invasions to America’s campaigns in Korea and Vietnam to the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Ultimately, what do these storylines tell us about the nature of war? What determines whether its victims will seek peace or vengeance?

3. Do Sheldon and Rhea experience Judaism in the same way? How does Sheldon’s Jewish identity affect his sense of legacy as he copes with the aging process?

4. Discuss Norway as if it were a character in the novel. How does the landscape --- both beautiful and treacherous --- reflect the storytelling? Is Norway a naïve utopia that will eventually succumb to the Envers of the world, or is it a shrewd stronghold that lives up to its Viking history?

5. What is the essential root of Enver’s power? Is his quest for his son driven entirely by his ego? What keeps Burim from breaking free, despite Adriana’s pleas?

6. How did you interpret Sheldon’s conversations with Bill? How do his memories of Bill and Mario surpass the bonds he has with his family? Are you ever aided by “ghosts” who deliver encouragement and good advice during trying circumstances?

7. Discuss the issue of gun control as it plays out in the novel, from Enver’s attempts to acquire weapons to the hunters who give aid to Sheldon and the boy. How does Sheldon’s former life as a sniper shape the way he sees the world? In the closing scenes, what does Lars demonstrate about the key to self-defense?

8. At the end of Chapter 16, as Saul searches for meaning in the aftermath of his tour of duty, what accounts for the differences between the way he and Sheldon see the role of an American soldier? Why does Saul reenlist?

9. How does Lars’s view of the world compare with Rhea’s? What makes them an unlikely yet compatible couple?

10. What gives Sheldon the ingenuity and stamina to outwit the police and Enver? In his attempts to protect the boy, what unfinished business from his own life is he pursuing?

11. What do Sigrid and Petter discover about their homeland while the case unfolds? What are their best assets as investigators?

http://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/norwegian-by-night/guide
12. Discuss the novel's title and the way it captures the expatriate experience. What do the novel's immigrants hope to gain from a life in Norway? How does the boy's disguise --- a costume of stereotypes --- capture the expat experience?

13. How were you affected by reading some of the scenes from Sheldon's seemingly lucid point of view, followed by evidence of his dementia? How does this help us experience the gray areas of memory and reality?

14. Without words, Sheldon's photographs speak volumes. What do you think they say? In the end, what does it take for him to make peace with his past?

15. As you watched the boy throughout the novel, what did you discover about the way humanity's struggles look through the eyes of a child?
July 30, 2012

BOOK CHEWING: My Interview with Derek B. Miller author of NORWEGIAN BY NIGHT

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD 'PICK OF THE WEEK'
‘This is a wonderful novel: thoughtful, complex, gripping and very funny.’ Kerryn Goldsworthy

Norwegian By Night is an absolutely amazing book. On the surface you could be mistaken thinking this is another crime novel in a Scandinavian setting, but it’s not. Derek B. Miller has written a novel that explores loss, both memory and emotional and also introduce readers to a fictional hero that will live on in your imagination long after you read the final page. Read my review of the book here.

Thanks to the fantastic people at Scribe Publications I was lucky enough to ask author Derek B. Miller some questions about his wonderful novel.

1. With Sheldon Horowitz you have created a unique literary hero that I certainly won’t forget. What was your inspiration for the character?

Sheldon, more than anything, is my way of saying goodbye to my grandfathers, and by extension, that entire generation. I needed to come to terms with the end of this generation, including their very deep and particular sense of Jewish-American patriotism. I sometimes worry this generation is too subject to caricature, just as I worry that the contemporary discussions around patriotism are as well. Perhaps one of the reasons Sheldon seems original is because of how distinctly he refuses to settle into the box we have ready-made for him.

Both of my grandfathers — Paul Miller and Lester Shapiro — were high school graduates only, were born in the U.S., were hard-working and self-made in every
conceivable way, and neither one ever complained a day in his life. We can talk about the British “stiff upper lip,” but that suggests understatement. For these guys, there was nothing to say to begin with.

Sheldon is not either of these men, but there is a spirit, a humor, and a sensibility on looking out at the world that they all share. I miss them very much.

More directly, Sheldon appeared as a minor character in a novel I was working on in 2003. It was the second of my unpublished manuscripts. He had such a powerful personality, and integrity of person, that I knew I wasn’t finished with him, nor he with me. But it took another five years before the right moment presented itself and the themes properly aligned, giving Sheldon a platform for action.

2. You have worked in international security affairs for fifteen years and written non fiction books on the subject. What drew you to writing fiction?

I was drawn by a chance to see the world, discover it, wrestle with it, and create something new in it using a set of tools for expression unavailable to me in other domains of life.

The work I do at The Policy Lab, and in cooperation with the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, is a highly collaborative, political, and social activity. It is therefore often tiring, frustrating, and exasperating — as many worthwhile things are.

Fiction, by contrast, I get to produce behind a closed and locked door in utter silence (that is, when the children aren’t pulling on my legs). It is uncompromising and uncooperative. I need that space. What drew me in is that the process itself makes me happy.

3. What was the hardest/easiest part about writing fiction?

There is the obvious answer that it is very hard finding the time to do this. I have a family and a day job. Maybe if I sell a few books I can choose a new balance in my life, but let’s not get ahead of ourselves…

More interestingly, perhaps, I needed to understand — at some theoretical level —
what made a story a story and not merely a sequence of utterances and events. That’s a trickier question than it sounds. Not everything with a beginning, middle and end is a story. Instruction manuals for TVs have those too.

So what distinguishes a story — as a genre of communication — from something else? The one book that helped me most was John Gardner’s The Art of Fiction. His notion of profluence — or the sense that we’re getting somewhere when reading — was instrumental in giving me a criterion for reflecting back on my work to interrogate it for value. It also helped me understand and address how tensions and resolutions work in drama. I also listen to a lot of music to understand how musicians achieve this.

The easy part, by contrast, was the exuberant pleasure that came from having no rules, no masters, no demands for propriety, diplomacy, or even collaboration. And frankly no consequences. After all, if you fail to help design a reintegration programme for excombatants after a civil war, then bad things happen and frequently do (hence why we’re working with the UN now to improve this). Meanwhile, if I write a bad novel, I’m unlikely to cause any real harm. To be able to express one’s self freely, creatively, and without harm to others is a rare opportunity indeed. And oh, the pleasure …

4. Your novel is a thriller but it also deals with dementia and grief in a very profound way. What was the reason you combined these two very distinct elements?

I’m interested in time and how it works. Dementia is the mind breaking down as a consequence of the brain itself failing — as a machine. Time, and our relation to it, is a first casualty.

Grief, at least in my view, is utterly different. It is the proper response of a well-functioning mind to human tragedy. I think grief brings us closer to the dead, which is why we don’t want the grieving to end. We can hold them close through our pain. This changes how we move through time.

What they have in common, then, is the challenge of memory and the experience of time. I decided to throw a child into Sheldon’s arms who reminded him of his own dead son, which forces time to fold back in on itself, therefore moving the story forward and backward simultaneously.
Why combine these with a thriller? I’m still not sure whether or not that’s what I did. I wanted to write something with a very simple and clear plot that then allowed me to improvise around themes that I wanted explored. The structure of a thriller — at least this one — provided that. I also wanted a driving plot for personal reasons, namely to overcome my own flaws in my writing. Sheldon helped me.

5. **Do you consider your book a thriller?**

This is connected to the previous question. I wanted to write a story that was rather more linear and clearly structured than my previous effort — which all got a little convoluted — and I remembered that great line from Chinatown where Jack Nicolson is told, “just … find the girl.” In this sense, Sheldon needs to “just … save the boy.” But, being who I am, I needed to complicate that at least a little by asking Sheldon to save one boy as a means of coming to terms with his inability to save another.

The end of the book brings these strands together. The last scene of the book came to me in the moments just before my son was born at the hospital. Julian was the inspiration, and that’s why I dedicated it to him. So I knew who Sheldon was, I knew what made him suffer, and I wrote the book to the final scene, giving Sheldon a moment I thought he deserved. That it evolved into a thriller — or something like one — was the natural evolution of the project.

So whether this is a thriller, per se, is still an open question to me and I have no vested interest with how its classified. It’s a story. That much I’m sure of.

6. **What brought you to Norway and why did you choose to set the novel there?**

My wife is Norwegian, so I was brought to Norway by a woman who outsmarted me. I’m not the only one suffering this fate. Norwegian women are crafty. Watch out for them.

But I wasn’t too hard to convince. It was time for me to leave Geneva, where I’d lived for over a decade, and Oslo was a lovely next step. I have two young kids — Julian and Clara — and it’s a nice place to be. I also love the outdoors — and quiet — and this suits me.
Concerning the setting of the book: One of the clichés in fiction writing is “write what you know.” I’ve never liked this, because it seems to me that adhering to what you know is not a good way to destabilize yourself and search for truths (remember that word? Can I still use it?).

I think a better aphorism might be, “write what you care about” because you will be spending a lot of time with these themes and ideas. In coming to Norway, I wanted to explore Norway. I also wanted to consider the Jewish experience in Norway. I’m Jewish, my wife is not, and so my children will always be negotiating and exploring their Norwegian, Jewish, and American identities. It is an interesting opportunity and I think it will prove to be a rewarding one. As a new father (this was 2008) I wanted to poke around in these themes for a while so I could get there first and maybe develop something helpful to say on the matter for when it arises in a decade and my kids start asking questions of their own. Setting the book here therefore let me explore Norway, Norwegian society and culture, humour, socio-political tensions, and history all as an outsider looking in. This was interesting to me.

Meanwhile, placing Sheldon in Norway turned out to be a lot more fun than I ever first suspected. Norwegians are my family now, and I do love them. Nonetheless, this book is partly my revenge.

7. Your novel was orignally published in Norway, in Norwegian, what has the process been like getting your book (originally written in English) published in English language markets?

No one wanted this book. I was pretty much rejected by everyone in the English-speaking world for more than two years. No one knew what kind of book it was or how to market it. I was told this explicitly. “We like the writing, but not sure we can sell it.” There really isn’t a reputable publisher who hasn’t turned this down. That is, in the end, aside from Scribe, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (U.S.) and Faber & Faber (UK).

So I decided to think strategically. After maybe twenty or thirty rejections, I stopped attacking the enemy at his strongest point (Vintage, Random House, etc.), and decided to attack the publishing world by invading a small, peaceful, and poorly defended country with a very strong interest in literature and a natural connection to the subject matter. People in the know said that Norway had never accepted a manuscript in a language other than Norwegian, and I said, “good, then they’ll never see me coming!”
And so Sheldon went to Norway as a new kind of gambit and it paid off. Cappelen Damm — an excellent publisher — was willing to read it in English, then they said yes to it, and off we went. This attracted some interest, and with careful fanning of the flames — helped by a German and French literary agency, passionate book scouts and editors to whom I am very grateful — it found a foothold in Germany, then France, then Israel, the Netherlands and finally an English-language publisher in Australia. Eventually, the U.S., UK, and Spain came on board as well.

It was Henry Rosenbloom — of Scribe Publications in Melbourne — who was the first English-language publisher to say yes. I knew Scribe’s excellent reputation, and I suspected that an intimate relationship with a small but highly experienced and well-positioned publisher might be a great way to get the support I’d surely need. I was right. I’m simply delighted to have the book coming out in Australia first. You all gave me the break, took the risk, and welcomed me in. Thanks.

Meanwhile, in the first chapter, Sheldon steals a rowboat from you Australians during the battle of Inchon in 1950. On his behalf, allow me to apologize.

8. War and its legacy is a big theme in your book. Do you think we can ever get over wars and more importantly should we?

I do believe that conflict is endemic to social interaction and that conflicts between societies will therefore continue to occur. However, I also think that there is much progress to be made in better managing and resolving conflicts. I feel confident in saying that states have not invested in building the tools necessary to engage the world’s plurality of cultural systems in ways that are informed by our differences. I believe real progress towards more peaceful co-existence will be the reward for relevant efforts in this regard. Just consider the expertise, budgets, systems and scholarship that has gone into winning war. And now compare that to what we’ve invested to avert, manage, or recover from war.

My colleague Lisa Rudnick and I have been working on designing “evidence-based” approaches to peace and security programming for almost a decade at The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and now through my own work at The Policy Lab.

At the moment, for example, we are assisting the UN to build new tools on the matter of reintegrating excombatants back into civilian life after wars — such as in
Libya, South Sudan, and other places. Such efforts pertain to matters such as human rights abuses, transitional justice, economic recovery, and how different societies manage the memory and morality of warfare and its atrocities. Until we recognize how different cultures are, and how they need to address these themes locally, we will never make serious progress.

So I absolutely believe that even if we can’t avert war entirely, we can get better, smarter, and more strategic in our efforts to assist societies in resolving conflict and recover from it.

9. What other writers have inspired you?

I haven’t sought to emulate anyone, but I’m very often inspired. In no particular order: James Salter for his language and very careful sense of emotional movement; Mark Helprin for his limitless imagination and mastery over what John Gardner called “the fictional dream”; William Maxwell for his clarity, and humanity, and quiet; Siri Hustvedt for how she looks out into the world, and what she sees in it; Richard Ford for creating worlds that make me feel like I can understand lives I haven’t lived, but might have or still may; Saul Bellow for being a master and serving as a mentor; Kurt Vonnegut for ... well ... his Vonnegutness; Nick Hornby for reminding me to lighten up, enjoy my writing, and just tell the story; John Irving for Owen Meany specifically, but also for holding the line and saying, “plot matters ... damn it” because he’s right. Many others of course. I could go on and on.

And just to toss these out there, it isn’t only the fiction masters who inspire me. In children’s literature — often overlooked for some reason — I love Dr. Seuss, Sandra Boynton, Oliver Jeffers, and Mo Willems among others. For humor I love listening to Eddie Izzard, George Carlin and David Sedaris. In non-fiction I have a long list but perhaps that’s another question. I am constantly dazzled and excited by fiction. The notion that it might be dying or needs help baffles me.

10. What books have you been reading lately?

I read slowly. Perhaps very slowly. These days, I’m more or less limiting my reading to books I think worthy of being read out loud. That’s when I hear the sentences and the voice. And that’s what makes me happy. I just finished Salter’s A Sport and a Pastime which should be read aloud, though its erotic content might get you arrested. Don’t let that stop you, though.
I recently read William Maxwell’s They Came Like Swallows. Many of his short stories too. The loss of Maxwell’s mother was a powerful force in his life, and I needed to understand how he portrayed it. Maxwell was a huge influence on how I came to think about Sheldon’s relationship to memory and time. I would strongly encourage everyone to listen to his interview on America’s National Public Radio. If you can keep from crying, you’re tougher than me.


I’m now reading Richard Ford’s Canada. I think Independence Day and Lay of the Land are among my favorite books. This, however, is my first ebook which I’m trying to read on an iPad and it is definitely slowing me down. I might buy it again in paperback.

I’ve been trying to read Franzen’s Freedom, but I’m having more trouble getting through it than … apparently … everyone else on the planet. I was a huge fan of The Corrections, though.

On the docket is Adam Haslett’s Union Atlantic. Adam and I went to high school together in Wellesley, Massachusetts. We were friends way back then. I haven’t seen him since … I suppose … 1988 when we graduated. I’m very curious to see what he’s writing. I hear it’s great.

Also on my contemporary list is Lean on Pete, by Willy Vlautin, A Long Long Way by Sebastian Barry, Jennifer Egan’s A Visit from the Goon Squad, and Chad Harbach’s The Art of Fielding. But I’m no slave to staying current, I don’t make the slightest effort to do so and I’m unapologetic about it. I’m also keen to read some James Thurber. I want to read more Oscar Wilde, and I also want to read more Tom Stoppard plays. Finally, I have to mention Andrew Delbanco’s wonderful non-fiction anthology called Writing New England, which is inspiring my next novel.
Derek B. Miller, Ph.D (U.S.) is the Director of The Policy Lab and a Founding Partner.

Miller has been working in security affairs for twenty years. He has been on staff or consulted for The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the Small Arms Survey, International Alert, UNDP, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, and other. He began his career as a Congressional Intern for then-Senator William S. Cohen (R-ME) at the 104th Congress in 1994.

Miller has a Ph.D. with distinction in International Relations from the University of Geneva, a DES from the formerly-named Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, an MA with a citation for academic excellence in national security studies from the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, and a BA in Liberal Arts from Sarah Lawrence College. He has conducted post-graduate work at both St. Catherine's and Linacre College at Oxford. He is a native of Boston and the critically acclaimed novelist of Norwegian by Night and The Girl in Green.


About The Policy Lab

The Policy Lab is an international policy design institute dedicated to improving the impact and adoptability of public policy initiatives.

The Policy Lab is committed to reducing barriers, creating conditions, and designing solutions for cooperative and effective action at the project, programming, and policy levels.

The Policy Lab was founded in Boston, Massachusetts, in 2011 and is a registered trade mark.

Origins of The Policy Lab

The Policy Lab was established in 2011 to help organizations achieve better impact “by design.”

Contact

The Policy Lab®
321 Columbus Avenue
Seventh Floor of the Electric Carriage House
Boston, MA 02116
United States of America
Telephone: +1 617 440 4409
Route taken by Sheldon & Paul by boat out of Oslo.
Google Maps

Hotel Continental to Kongsvinger, Norway

Drive 95.4 km, 1 h 17 min

Google Maps

Routes to Rhea + Lars’s cabin just past Kongsvinger near the Swedish border.