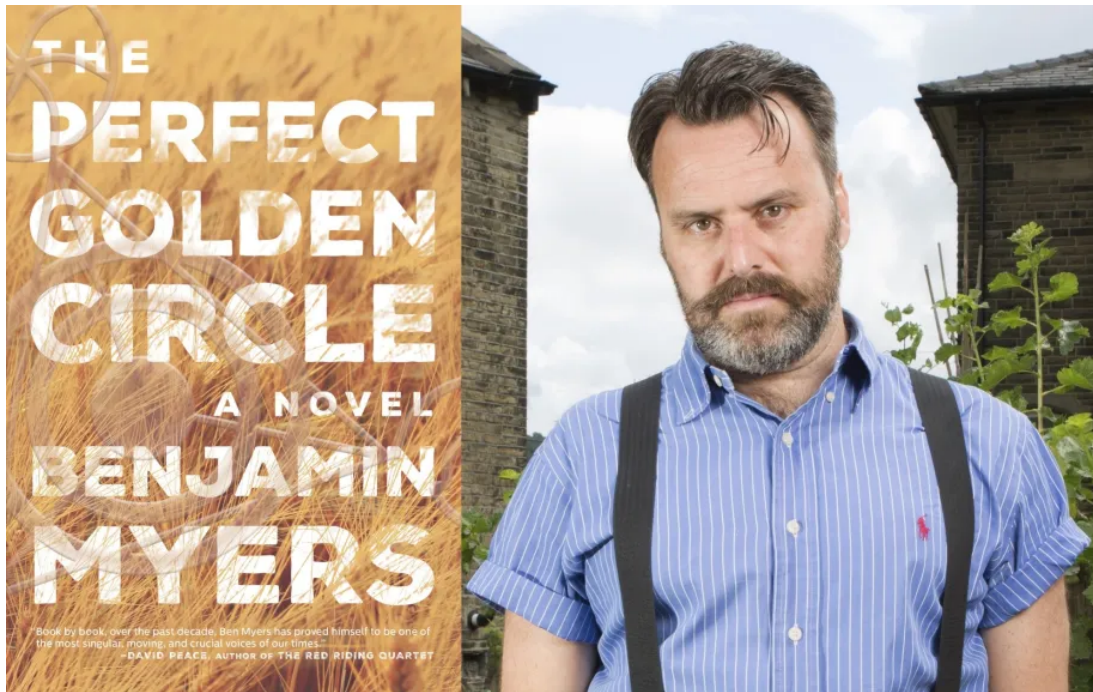


## Novelist Benjamin Myers talks crop circles and climate change in 'The Perfect Golden Circle'

The author, whose novel 'The Gallows Pole' is coming to TV, describes a turbulent time very much like our own.



Benjamin Myers is the author of "The Perfect Golden Circle," out May 17 from Melville House. (Photo by Richard Sacker / Cover courtesy of Melville House)



By **ERIK PEDERSEN** | [epedersen@scng.com](mailto:epedersen@scng.com)

PUBLISHED: May 17, 2022 at 7:00 a.m. | UPDATED: May 18, 2022 at 5:36 p.m.

As night falls during the hot turbulent summer of 1989, two men slip into the darkened fields of England to manufacture strangely inspired artworks that transfix and baffle the nation.

The two conspirators, one a former soldier of the Falklands War and the other an eccentric wanderer, devise vast elaborate crop circles in the wheat and the barley, leaving no trace but their designs and disappearing before the dawn.


In Benjamin Myers' "The Perfect Golden Circle," out May 17 from Melville House, the twosome, Redbone and Calvert, are bound in their secret project as the nation roils with protests and police crackdowns. Even as the book explores a 33-year-old historical moment, its concerns — income inequality, police brutality and climate change, among them — remain remarkably current.

**Related:** For more on authors and bestsellers, check out the Book Pages

"There were a lot of violent clashes around Stonehenge, which is visually quite an amazing thing to see. All these kinds of freewheeling hippie punks and police charging in with riot shields and truncheons," says Myers, who was 13 in the summer of 1989.

"So that was the entire backdrop that was taking place during the day. But meanwhile, in the same county at night, there were men and women going out on these amazing sort of artistic adventures, doing something which was a lot more peaceful and beautiful."

AD



Continue watching

**Lakers start in-season tournament seeking 1st road win**  
after the ad

Myers spoke from his home in Hebden Bridge, a small artistic West Yorkshire town between Leeds and Manchester in England. A journalist whose work has appeared in The Guardian, Mojo and Le Monde, Myers' books include "The Offing," "Pig Iron" and "The Gallows Pole," the latter of which is being adapted for TV. This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

**Q. "The Perfect Golden Circle" involves crop circles. What got you interested in that?**

The idea came about came to me in the middle of a crop field in the summer. It just kind of arrived. In the summer of 2019, my previous novel, "The Offing," had come out in the UK and I was just completely burnt-out and anxious and kind of exhausted.

I walked out into this field. It was June, it was sunny, and this idea came: You should write a novel about two men and they walk out into these fields like you're doing now. It'd be 10 chapters long, each one a crop circle, set in the summer of 1989. That was the length of it, 10 seconds. I just thought, [bleep] you, I don't want to write a book, I'm exhausted. But I went and made some notes, I wrote it all down, and put it aside for a few months. And then I sat down and wrote the entire thing from beginning to end and finished the week before the first COVID lockdown in early 2020.

**Q. During the course of your research, did you learn anything about crop circles that stuck with you?**

I'm not that interested in crop circles, per se; I'm interested in when they happened, which in the UK was 1989, and also I'm more interested in the who and the why than the how. So you'll notice that in the book, I don't really touch upon any of the conspiracy theories or UFOs or anything, because that was all debunked pretty early on.

I really wanted to kind of explore the idea of who did them and why, because it's such an ego-free pursuit. These days, when you do a creative endeavor, you want your name on it, and you want the acclaim. So the anonymity of the crop circle creators was what drew me to them.

At the same time, to write about that world I did have to do research. One of the things I found out is that a large proportion of the British crop circles were created by two farmers who were really modest and unassuming and who came forward and said, "Yeah, we did it and this is how we did it" and kind of debunked all the conspiracy theories within 30 seconds. They did it using some planks and some pieces of rope.

I was drawn to the idea because crop circles couldn't be monetized. They're sort of great examples of landscape art, but they can't be sold, they can't be put into a gallery. And the only people who actually made any money off it were a few enterprising farmers who charged people to go on their land or the British press, who would send out airplanes to take aerial shots.

**Q. My first experience with your work was picking up "The Gallows Pole" while traveling in England. Can you talk about that book a bit?**

The book, it's kind of been a slow-burning thing in the UK; it came out five years ago and it's had a real, like, small indie band growth to it. Before I started writing it, I had the idea of sort of "The Sopranos" or "The Wire," but set in 18th century Yorkshire.

Really, it's kind of about the neglected underclass taking things into their own hands, in this case, through a criminal venture. But I thought the divide between rich and poor, which is kind of widening at the moment in Britain, was something that was felt then and could be felt today.

**Q. Do you have any idea why interest in "The Gallows Pole" has lasted beyond the usual publishing cycle?**

Not really, no. I mean, it's word of mouth, I think, and booksellers got behind it. It started really locally, it was first published by a little indie publisher who were based about a mile from here, Bluemoose. We've kind of built it up that way in Yorkshire, then the north of England, then all of England and Britain. And then it won this prize, the Walter Scott Prize for historical fiction, which turned out to be quite a big deal. It's the biggest historical fiction prize in the world in terms of the prize that gives you [roughly \$30,000].

Now it's been filmed, and the director is Shane Meadows. He's like a really popular cult film director here. So that's taken it to a kind of another level of visibility, I guess. And I'm in that strange period where this TV series has been shot, but it hasn't been broadcast, and I'm waiting for it to go out.

That's a long-winded answer to say, I don't know. I don't know why it's steadily grown.

**Q. You address climate change in the book, and there's almost a sense of a retrospective, melancholic hope that 32 years ago we might have seen what was happening and acted then.**

Yeah, definitely. That was something which probably came in a little later when I was rewriting the book. I thought, I need to address this.

Things have irrefutably, irreversibly accelerated in the past few years, and I kind of wanted to jump back to that naiveté of when we didn't know anything about climate change or global warming. All we knew was what we were told on the news, and it was a very simplified version, like plastic wasn't discussed, the single-use plastics, or how the oceans are full of poison.

I'm not like some hardcore activist; I'm just a human being who's aware of how badly wrong it's going, and I feel totally helpless. You know, I do my recycling, and I try and use my reusable coffee cup and stuff, but it just feels so futile. I wanted to capture how it feels today, but through the lens of the past and how naive we were really.

I think most people would want to save the planet when it comes down to it but there are so many distractions and so many day-to-day details of living that you have to get through. I've got no power at all, but my only way of handling it is to write stories in which I hope make people, even if it's just a few thousand people, stop and maybe think slightly differently about something.

**Q. In your new book, one of the characters says, "This isn't about the patterns or the crops, it's about the land." Do you think that's a throughline in your work?**

Yeah, I think it is, actually. This is probably the thing I've written most with the idea of climate change somewhere behind it. I mean, I like the countryside, and I spend a lot of time just wandering about; our house kind of opens out, just out the back is fields, and then hills, then empty moorlands and desolate reservoirs. And so I draw a lot of inspiration from the land.

But I'm also aware that the landscape is always changing and that's natural, that's what happens. I don't think it should stay the same, but I feel that a lot of it is changing for the worse. For example, whenever I go back to Durham where I grew up, I see patches of land becoming retail parks or strip malls, you'd call them shopping centers. And that's just within my lifetime. I'm seeing there's a lot of change. And it's the change is generally to accommodate retail, or now when I drive up the motorway to visit my parents, and just before I get to Durham, normally, you can see this cathedral that was built 1,000 years ago. Now you see a massive Amazon warehouse blocking the skyline in the middle of the fields.

## RELATED ARTICLES

**This week's bestsellers at Southern California's independent bookstores**

**This Santa Monica pop-up brings the work of Dr. Seuss to life**

So I'm just kind of aware that the landscape does need protecting and or at least respectfully considered. And that is something that is in the background of everything I write, particularly this new novel. It's about two men being respectful to the land that they're working on. Because when crop circles were made and were in the press in the 1980s, a lot of the stories, if they weren't about alien visitation,

**How 'American Confidential' explores JFK assassin Lee Harvey Oswald and his mom**

---

they were about these terrible hooligans and vandals who were destroying the crops.

**'The Reformatory' author Tananarive Due says one horror story made her scream**

---

But actually, they weren't; they did it in such a way that the crops recovered. And I like the idea of these crop circles disappearing almost like invisible ink, you know, you can make something and within a week, it's gone. So I wanted to kind of consider the fact that these guys were artists who were using their fields as a canvas. And maybe that's the kind of metaphor for some of my thoughts about how landscapes should

**After nearly 200 episodes, the 'Backlisted' podcast isn't running out of great books**

---

be respected and more thoughtfully used.