

**SPECIAL** Creative Writing/ Creative Memoirs 13 July 2016 2-4 p.m.  
**VENUE: CALVART GALLERY** in the old Prince Frederick shopping center, between Greene Turtle and EZThai, up from post office, **NOT** Calvert Library (because the kiddies take over Calvert Library in July). Bring about ten copies of up to 800 words of memoir or fiction or a poem, but you can have more in reserve in case we have time. See if my eclectic cornucopia sets off a memoir, story or poem in your head as they did in my own cat's cradle of imagination...

Contemporary Literary History: Do read the attached article on Ferlinghetti and the Beats. City Lights bookstore was where I used to hang out when Kirk and Cam were small and we lived on Telegraph Hill on the other side of the hill above North Beach. I was reading *On the Road* while in labor with Cameron, and she emerged baggy-eyed from the trip.

## *Lesvos* Christopher Bakken

Fishermen out before dawn. None returned.  
I asked you why they left their nets behind,  
  
but you were looking out, across to Assos,  
and maybe didn't hear me in the wind.  
  
We both wore the same ironic mask:  
one blue eye floating upon a white sea.  
  
On that balcony, beside the iron table,  
a geranium held on for dear life.  
  
All day we watched waves capsize in the rain.  
Our shoreline here: the other shoreline's mirror.  
  
Those aren't nets, you said after a long time,  
but mounds of sodden jackets and lost oars.  
  
Stray cats sheltered in the light of the café.  
We didn't know the others huddled there.

The wind changed course and tried to explain  
by shaking the geranium, but words sank  
in the crossing, so we heard under water.  
When I opened my hands, my palms burned,  
as if they'd been lashed by splintered wood.  
In sleep, you told me, we have been rowing.  
Truth is, no one here knows where we're going.  
I begged you not to leave, but you'd already  
slung a orange scarf over your wet head.  
There aren't enough boats to carry them,  
I shouted, so there's nothing left to do.  
There is, you said. I'm going down to see.

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**About This Poem** “I have spent a lot of time over the years in Molyvos (a port town on Lesbos) and also in Assos (just across the water on the Turkish mainland). In the past two years, an estimated three to five thousand refugees drowned while attempting to cross the stretch of water separating those two places. Many of my Greek and expatriate friends have volunteered on Lesbos, or in refugee camps on the northern border town of Idomeni. What they have described is heartbreaking. The poem registers my sense of regret for not being there, if only to bear witness.”

—*Christopher Bakken*

**CalvArt Gallery: new exhibit of Mary Blumberg’s paintings and Kevin Higgins’ photography. Reception Saturday, July 9, 5-8. Also launch of *Plum Point Folio*, a collaborative collection of poems and photos by Christine and Kevin Higgins, Shelden Studios. Exhibit will be up July 6-August 7, 2016. Prince Frederick Shopping Center near Greene Turtle and up from post office.**

I suffer guilt also because though I am always reading something, how few entire books I read now compared to my previous book-a-day voraciousness...But all of Proulx devoured....

**Annie Proulx: By the Book** *New York Times* JUNE 23, 2016



Annie Proulx Credit Illustration by Jillian Tamaki  
*The author of [“The Shipping News”](#) and, most recently, [“Barkskins”](#) says books of prognostication, business, technology, entrepreneurial success and patriotic stuff are “not my cup of tea.”*

**What books are currently on your night stand?**

**Dermot Healy, “The Collected Short Stories”; “The Penguin Book of First World War Prose”; Giorgio Bassani, “The Gold-Rimmed Spectacles”; Graham Greene, “Lord Rochester’s Monkey”; “Game Pie: An Anthology of Shooting,” with additional material by Lord Tweedsmuir; Elsa Morante, “History: A Novel”; Philip Pullman, “Fairy Tales From the Brothers Grimm”; Richard Grant, “Dispatches From Pluto: Lost and Found in the Mississippi Delta.”**

**What’s the last great book you read?**

**Ivo Andric, “The Bridge on the Drina.”**

**Which writers — novelists, playwrights, critics, journalists, poets — working today do you admire most?**

**Michael Ondaatje, Lydia Davis, Les Murray, Alice Munro, Russell Banks are a few. Some of the writers I most admired have died in the last few years — Aidan Higgins, Dermot Healy, Robert Hughes, Peter Matthiessen, Umberto Eco, Wislawa Szymborska.**

**Your very first stories were science fiction. Do you read science fiction for pleasure or did you back then? Which writers?**

**I did read it for pleasure when I was in my teens — Ray Bradbury, Asimov, Arthur Clarke, Pohl and many others. Eventually the genre seemed constricted and much of the writing too tricky, even disappointing. The pleasure disappeared long ago, and I have not read science fiction for years.**

**What genres do you especially enjoy reading? And which do you avoid?**

**I like reading books concerned with natural history, archaeology, history, geography, gardening, old exploration and adventure, art. Apsley Cherry-Garrard's "The Worst Journey in the World" was a favorite for years, along with Jim Corbett's "Man-Eaters of Kumaon" and H. W. Tilman's climbing adventures. Sometimes crime or mystery books for relaxation. Paul Scott's "Raj Quartet." Not very keen on American fiction. Politics, books of prognostication, business, technology, entrepreneurial success stories, sentimental and patriotic stuff and the like are not my cup of tea.**

**You've mentioned liking natural history and science books. Read any good ones recently you'd recommend?**

**I recently reread Bland Simpson's fine "The Great Dismal: A Carolinian's Swamp Memoir," beautiful writing by someone who knew this famously forbidding tangle of canals and legends from childhood. And all of Tim Flannery's books.**

**What are your favorite books about Vermont? About Wyoming?**

**The Vermont writer Rowland E. Robinson's orthography, tortured to reproduce the Vermont argot of 19th-century farmers and refugee French Canadians, still fascinates me, and I like his stories. For me the best Wyoming books are old journals and diaries by soldiers stationed at the various Wyoming forts, and photographs without text.**

**Tell us about your favorite short story writers.**

**When I was in my teens I liked the stories of Ring Lardner and W. Somerset Maugham — and Katherine Anne Porter. In my 20s I enjoyed translated Japanese short fiction, especially the creepy stories of Edogawa Rampo; all of Isaac Bashevis Singer. Today I very much admire the short stories of Ha Jin, Tim Gautreaux, the smart stories of Pritchett and the empathetic work of Alice Munro.**

**What moves you most in a work of literature?**

**Extraordinary sentences, flashes of fresh perception, a carefully constructed edifice with deep meaning.**

**Who is your favorite fictional hero or heroine? Your favorite antihero or villain? None of the above.**

**What kind of reader were you as a child? Which childhood books and authors stick with you most?**

**Omnivorous reader. Early on began reading adult books alongside “Alice in Wonderland,” “The Jungle Books,” “Treasure Island” and the Bobbsey Twins; Dorothy Canfield Fisher’s “Understood Betsy.” Read Jack London’s “Before Adam” when I was 8, greatly moved by the anger and bullying of Red-Eye; was given a copy of “One Life, One Kopeck” when I was 9 or 10, understood only that Russia was awful and that a kopeck was less than a penny. My grandmother gave me a first edition of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” which over the years I ruined with reading and careless treatment until it was lost.**

**Which book did you hate reading as a student?**

**I didn’t hate any books during student years except perhaps — almost — Cicero’s letters and Caesar’s “Gallic Wars.” I was fortunate to have been a student before “To Kill a Mockingbird” was obligatory reading for anyone who could hold a book.**

**If you had to name one book that made you who you are today, what would it be? Over the years there were many books that changed my sense of the world and my place in it, but the first shake-up came from Katherine Anne Porter’s “Pale Horse, Pale Rider.” That literature could come off the page and fill you with bitterness and longing and astonishment was an epiphany.**

**If you could require the president to read one book, what would it be?**

**Tim Flannery’s “The Weather Makers” and the same author’s “The Eternal Frontier.” More important than the political footballs of gun control, free trade, a variety of discriminations and fear of the Other is the game-ender reality of climate change.**

**What author living or dead would you most like to meet, and what would you like to know?**

**Maybe Rimbaud — and ask him what he thought of David Wojnarowicz’s work.**

**Disappointing, overrated, just not good: What book did you feel you were supposed to like, and didn’t? Do you remember the last book you put down without finishing?**

**I have tried many times to read Hugo Claus’s “The Sorrow of Belgium” but have never made it very far. Still, I keep trying and hoping I will catch the excellence and the humor that so many others have found.**

**Of the books you've written, which is your favorite or the most personally meaningful?**

**Either "Accordion Crimes" or "Barkskins."**

**Whom would you want to write your life story?**

**S. J. Perelman.**

**What do you plan to read next?**

**"Birding in the San Juan Islands."**

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**And here is a rather different book and situation, described in *New York Times*, 18 June 2016:**

**The archivist stumbled across the file in a stack of boxes on the second floor of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. The yellowing letters inside dated back more than half a century, chronicling the dreams and struggles of a young man in Kenya.**

**He was ambitious and impetuous, a 22-year-old clerk who could type 75 words a minute and translate English into Swahili. But he had no money for college. So he pounded away on a typewriter in Nairobi, pleading for financial aid from universities and foundations across the Atlantic. His letters would help change the course of American history.**

**"It has been my long cherished ambition to further my studies in America," he wrote in 1958. His name was Barack Hussein Obama, and his dispatches helped unleash a stream of scholarship money that carried him from Kenya to the United States. There, he fathered the child who would become the nation's first black president, only to vanish from his son's life a few years after his birth.**

**In 2013, the Schomburg Center invited President Obama to see the newly discovered documents, which included nearly two dozen of his father's letters, his transcripts from the University of Hawaii and Harvard University, and references from professors, advisers and supporters. Nearly three years later, as Mr. Obama celebrates his last Father's Day in the White House, the center is still waiting for a response.**

**The trove of documents, described publicly here for the first time, renders a portrait of Barack Obama Sr. in his own words, sometimes in his own handwriting, as he describes his studies in the United States. But it also lays bare the beginnings of the fractured relationship between father and son.**

**Photo**



Barack Obama with his father, Barack Obama Sr., in an undated family photo from the 1960s released by Mr. Obama's presidential campaign. CreditObama for America

**A senior White House official said President Obama would be interested in seeing the documents after he leaves office next year, but declined to comment on why administration officials had not responded to the letter or to follow-up correspondence.**

**“The papers are rich; they tell a fascinating, traditional, self-made man’s story,” said Khalil Gibran Muhammad, the director of the Schomburg Center, who said he hoped Mr. Obama would read them someday. “There’s a reason to bear witness to the personal legacy that is here.”**

**As president, Mr. Obama has spoken openly and repeatedly about the void his father left in his life. Barack Obama Sr. went home to Kenya in 1964, when Mr. Obama was 3 years old, and returned to visit his son only once, for a month, when Mr. Obama was 10. In an interview with *The New York Times* last month, the president said his father’s absence had left him struggling as a teenager to figure out “what it meant to be a man.”**

**Mr. Obama explored his sense of loss and longing more deeply in his memoir, “Dreams from My Father,” describing his quest to learn more about the man who shared his name. He found some answers on a visit to Kenya, when he was in his 20s, but not all of them. “I still didn’t know the man my father had been,” he wrote. “What had shaped his ambitions?”**

It has been my long cherished ambition to further my studies especially in America and therefore any slight assistance which you would be kind enough to offer me with regard to this would very much be appreciated. I would have furthered my studies locally had/been that there were any colleges or Universities in our country Kenya, but due to the fact that we have none, it has therefore been difficult for me to further my studies taking into consideration my financial difficulties.

**Barack Obama’s Sr.’s letters, which span the period from 1958 to 1964, offer new insights, particularly about his years in the United States. But the records, which were preserved among the papers of a foundation that provided scholarships to African students at the time, may also resurrect old pain.**

**It was while pursuing his undergraduate degree at the University of Hawaii in 1960 that Barack Obama Sr. met Ann Dunham, a classmate. Although he already had a wife and two children in Kenya, he married her the following year, after she became pregnant. Their son was born on Aug. 4, 1961. But Barack Obama Sr. never mentioned his new wife and son, not even in his scholarship applications.**

**In 1963, as he applied for a grant to help cover his graduate studies at Harvard, Barack Obama Sr. was asked on a financial aid form about his marital status and number of dependents. He left the section blank.**

**Relatives have described Barack Obama Sr. as a complicated man, brilliant and imperious, charming and brash, who began to drink heavily as his dreams of becoming one of Kenya’s leading government economists foundered. He died in a car crash at age 46 without ever fulfilling his early promise.**

**The elder Obama’s youngest brother, Said Obama, noted in a telephone interview from Kenya this month that he hoped the records would help the family understand his sibling more fully. He said Barack Obama Sr. had never stopped caring about the son he left behind, recalling how he proudly showed off the photograph and school progress reports of the young man who would become president. “He loved his son,” Said Obama recalled. “I don’t think you do such things if you don’t love your son.”**

**President Obama often describes his life as an only-in-America saga, the improbable rise of the son of a white woman from Kansas and a black man from Kenya to the American presidency. But his father’s ascent was**



**astounding, too, as he journeyed from the dusty roads of his rural village to the halls of Harvard.**

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## Medusa

Louise Bogan

I had come to the house, in a cave of trees,  
Facing a sheer sky.  
Everything moved,—a bell hung ready to strike,  
Sun and reflection wheeled by.

When the bare eyes were before me  
And the hissing hair,  
Held up at a window, seen through a door.  
The stiff bald eyes, the serpents on the forehead  
Formed in the air.

This is a dead scene forever now.  
Nothing will ever stir.  
The end will never brighten it more than this,  
Nor the rain blur.

The water will always fall, and will not fall,  
And the tipped bell make no sound.  
The grass will always be growing for hay  
Deep on the ground.

And I shall stand here like a shadow  
Under the great balanced day,  
My eyes on the yellow dust, that was lifting in the wind,  
And does not drift away.

“Medusa” was first published in *The New Republic* in December of 1921.

**Again in the sea: Despite one typo this is another interesting piece from Delancey's daily selections of history etc. This is from *The Soul of an Octopus* by Sy Montgomery. "Recently, we learned, that Inky the Octopus escaped from The National Aquarium of New Zealand. In honor of Inky's "Great Escape" we bring you suggestions on how to keep an octopus entertained and what could happen if an octopus is bored.**

**"A giant Pacific octopus -- the largest of the world's 250 or so octopus species -- can easily overpower a person. Just one of a big male's three-inch-diameter suckers can lift 30 pounds, and a giant Pacific octopus has 1,600 of them. An octopus bite can inject a neurotoxic venom as well as saliva that has the ability to dissolve flesh. Worst of all, an octopus can take the opportunity to escape from an open tank, and an escaped octopus is a big problem for both the octopus and the aquarium. ...**

**"In 2007, the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo put together an enrichment handbook for octopus, filled with ideas of how to keep these smart creatures entertained. Some aquariums hide food inside a Mr. Potato Head and let the octopus dismantle the toy. Others offer Legos. Oregon State University's Hatfield Marine Science Center has devised a contraption that allows an octopus to create art by moving levers that release paint onto a canvas -- which is then auctioned to generate funds to maintain the octopus tank.**

**"At the Seattle Aquarium, Sammy the giant Pacific octopus enjoyed playing with a baseball-size plastic ball that could be screwed together by twisting the two halves. A staffer put food inside the ball but later was surprised to find that not only had the octopus opened the ball, it had screwed it back together when it was done. Another toy was constructed from the plastic tubing through**

**which pet gerbils like to tunnel. Rather than probe into the tunnel with his arms, which was what the aquarists had expected, Sammy liked to unscrew the pieces -- and when he was done, he handed them off to his tank mate, an anemone. The anemone, who, like all of its kind, was brainless, held on to the pieces with its tentacles for a while, bringing them to its mouth, and finally spat them out.**

**Wilson [Menashi] was ahead of the curve. Long before the first octopus-enrichment handbook was published ... he set out to create a safe toy worthy of an octopus's intellect. ... Wilson devised a series of three clear Plexiglas cubes with different locks. The smallest of the three has a sliding latch that twists to lock down, like the bolt on a horse's stall. You can put a live crab -- a favorite food -- inside and leave the lid unlocked. The octopus will lift the lid. When you lock the lid, invariably the octopus will figure out how to open it. Then it's time to deploy the second cube. This one has a latch that slides counterclockwise to catch on a bracket. You put the crab in the first box and then lock it inside the second box. The octopus will figure it out. And finally, there's a third cube. This one has two different latches: a bolt that slides into position to lock down, and a second one with a lever arm sealing the lid much like and old-fashioned canning jar closes. ... [O]nce the octopus 'gets it,' the animal can open all four locks in three or four minutes. ...**

**"Boring your octopus is not only cruel; it's a hazard. ... In Santa Monica, a small California two-spot octopus, only perhaps eight inches long, managed to flood the aquarium's offices with hundreds of gallons of water by experimenting with a valve in her tank, causing thousands of dollars worth of damage by ruining the brand-new, ecologically designed floors.**

**"Another danger of boredom is that your octopus may try to go someplace more interesting. They are Houdini-like in their ability to escape their enclosures. L. R. Brightwell of the Marine Biological Station in Plymouth, UK, once encountered an octopus crawling down the stairs at two thirty in the morning. It had escaped from its tank in the station's laboratory. While on a trawler in the English Channel, an octopus who had been caught and left on deck somehow managed to slither from the deck, down the companionway, to the cabin. Hours later, it was found hiding in a teapot. Another octopus, held in a small private aquarium in Bermuda, pushed off the lid from its tank, slid to the floor, crawled off a veranda, and headed home to the sea. The animal had traveled about 100 feet before it collapsed on the lawn, where it was attacked by a horde of ants and died.**

**"Perhaps an even more surprising case was reported in June 2012, when a security officer at California's Monterey Bay Aquarium found a banana peel on the floor in front of the Shale Reef exhibit at 3 a.m. On closer inspection, the banana peel turned out to be a healthy, fist-size red octopus. The security officer followed the wet slime trail and replaced the octopus in the exhibit it had come from."**

**So now you know how to keep your pet octopus entertained..**

The following, from Delancey Place which daily carries super excerpts from various books of history and life, also focuses attention on the need to be precise:

**- from *Spice: A History of Temptation* by Jack Turner. The definition of herbs and spices, and the most exceptional spice of them all -- pepper:**

**"Broadly, a spice is not an herb, understood to mean the aromatic, herbaceous, green parts of plants. Herbs are leafy, whereas spices are obtained from other parts of the plant: bark, root, flower, bud, gums and resins, seed, fruit or stigma. Herbs tend to grow in temperate climates, spices in the tropics. Historically, the implication was that a spice was far less readily obtainable than an herb -- and far more expensive. ...**

**"Briefly, the chemistry of spices-- what in the final analysis makes a spice a spice -- is, in evolutionary terms, what quills are to the porcupine or the shell to the tortoise. In its natural state cinnamon is an elegant form of armor; the seductive aroma of nutmeg is, to certain insects, a bundle of toxins. The elemental irony of their history is that the attractiveness of spices is (from the plant's perspective) a form of Darwinian backfiring. What makes a spice so appealing to humans is, to other members of the animal kingdom, repulsive. ...**

**"By any measure the most exceptional of the spices, and far and away the most historically significant, is pepper. The spice is the fruit of *Piper nigrum*, a perennial climbing vine native to India's Malabar Coast. ... Black pepper, the most popular variety, is picked while unripe ... white pepper is the same fruit left longer on the vine."**