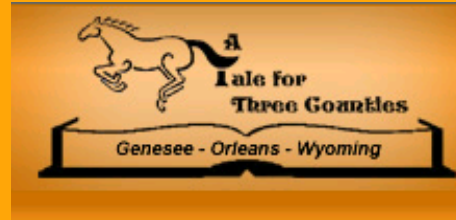


# 2012



"This is a wonderful novel. Original, suspenseful, funny, and profoundly moving. It's about family, community, the human bond with animals, and—oh yeah—spaceships. I am in awe of Yannick Murphy's achievement and I plan to recommend it to everyone I know." —Geraldine Brooks, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Caleb's Crossing*

A NOVEL

# The Call

A silhouette of a cow standing in front of the letter 'C' in the title 'The Call'.

YANNICK MURPHY

[www.taleforthreecounties.org](http://www.taleforthreecounties.org)

# AUTHOR BIO

Yannick Murphy grew up in New York City. She attended Stuyvesant High School, where she was fortunate enough to have Frank McCourt as a teacher. She continued her education at Hampshire College, where she did course work with James Baldwin, and then pursued a graduate degree at New York University, where she worked with Gordon Lish. Yannick Murphy writes for both children and adults. Her first book, a collection of short fiction entitled *Stories in Another Language* appeared in 1987. She followed this with a novel, *The Sea of Trees* (1997), set in China during the Second World War. Murphy's work explores a wide variety of forms, settings, and genres, and has more than once led her to reflect on the differences between adult and children's literature.

**Is it hard to come up with a good idea for a children's book? Yes, it is. Is it hard to come up with a good idea for a novel, yes, for me it is. Is it hard to sit down and do the physical writing once that idea is in place? No, that's when the fun starts. Maybe they are both hard and both fun, but since children's books are shorter, the fun doesn't last as long, whereas the novel lasts longer, but it also challenges you to sustain the fun in a longer piece. What's really fun is when, in a longer piece, you have the control and at the same time you are open to where the writing is going and not where you want it to go. What's really *not* fun is when you have a lot of words strung out with no meaning in sight and no way to get back to the meaning you thought the first sentence had before you even wrote it.** (<http://west10th.org/2010/11/03/an-interview-with-yannick-murphy/>)



Murphy has attained success in both forms. Her works for children include *Ahwoooooooo!* (2006), *Baby Polar* (2009), and *The Cold Water Witch* (2010).

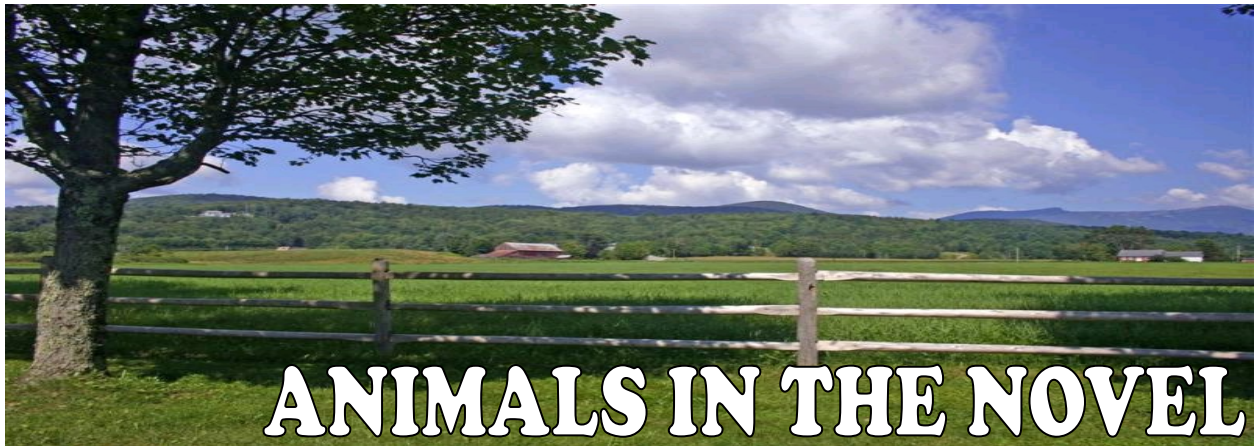
Her adult novels are *Here They Come* (2007), *Signed, Mata Hari: A Novel* (2007), and 2011's *The Call*. Her short fiction has been anthologized in *Best American Nonrequired Reading* and *The O. Henry Prize Stories*. Well received by both critics and readers, Murphy's work has been recognized with several awards, including a Whiting Writer's Award (1990), a National Endowment for the Arts Award, a Chesterfield Screenwriting Award, and a MacDowell Colony fellowship.

Yannick Murphy lives in Vermont with her husband and their three children.

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<<http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.nioga.org/novelist/detail?vid=9>>.



# ANIMALS IN THE NOVEL

**Alpaca** - The alpaca is a domesticated llama of the camel family. Like the llama, it spits when angry. The natural habitat of the alpaca is the Andes mountains of South America. The alpaca is smaller than the llama and has longer softer wool. These animals are generally kept for their wool. The alpaca provides a variety of colors, including white, gray, or yellow wool, although the black and dark brown fibers are especially valued.

(p. 5 in *The Call*)



**Fisher Cat** - The fisher cat is a large, dark, long-haired member of the weasel family. Adult males weigh from 7 to 12 pounds and may be 40 inches long. Adult females are smaller, weighing from 4 to 5.5 pounds. Fishers are predators that prey on medium sized mammals and poultry. Fisher Cats are the only predator that hunts and eats porcupines. They seldom do any fishing or eat any fish at all. (p. 8)



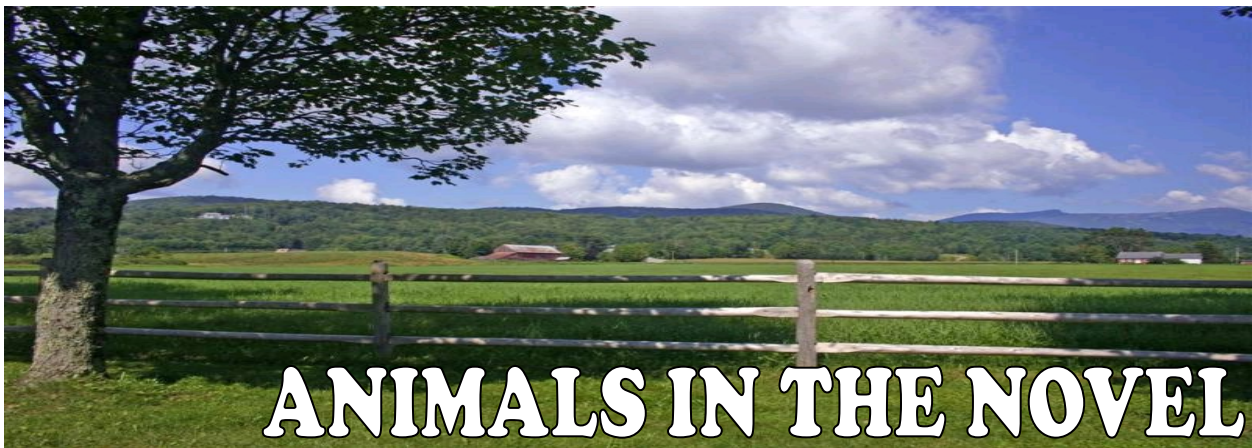
Weimaraner (p. 67)



Borzoi (p. 143)



Blue Heeler (p. 175)



# ANIMALS IN THE NOVEL

The **Chianina** (pronounced kee-a-nee-na) may well be one of the oldest breeds of cattle in existence. The breed originated primarily in the west central part of Italy. Until recent times the Chianina were used primarily as draft animals in their homeland. With the advent of modern mechanized farming practices the emphasis has been placed on the breeds ability to produce beef. (p. 74)

[www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/cattle/chianina/](http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/cattle/chianina/)



**Budgerigar** - The budgerigar is a small colorful bird native to Australia. The budgerigar is often called a parakeet or a budgie and the budgie is one of the most popular birds to keep as pets, both in outside aviaries and in cages in homes. Budgerigars are thought to be popular pets due to their small size and brightly colored feathers. The budgerigar is a very sociable bird and budgies can be seen gathering in large flocks in trees and scrub land in the Australian wilderness. (p. 114)



**Icelandic Ponies** - The Icelandic horse is a breed of horse developed in Iceland. The Icelandic Horse averages less than 14.1 hands high (4 feet, 8 inches). Because of their size they are often referred to as ponies, however these are very strong horses and routinely carry full size adults. They are known for their character, which is brave, happy, and confident. (p. 82)





## Terminology in the Novel

**Bute paste** is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug for treatment of pain and fever in horses. (pp. 3, 70 in *The Call*)

**Nematodes** are unsegmented worms with elongated rounded body pointed at both ends; mostly free-living but some are parasitic. (p. 14)

**Floating teeth** means to smooth or contour a horse's teeth with a file (called a "float"). Unlike a human's teeth, a horse's teeth keep growing. At times, a horse's teeth may develop sharp edges, making it difficult for her to chew food, hold a bit, or the horse may simply have pain and discomfort inside her mouth. (p. 14)

**Glasgow Coma Scale** is based on a 15 point scale for estimating and categorizing the outcomes of brain injury on the basis of overall social capability or dependence on others. The test measures the motor response, verbal response and eye opening response (To see the values on the scale, go to <http://www.traumaticbraininjury.com/content/symptoms/glasgowcomascale.html>) (p. 33)

**Spavin test** is done by holding the horse's hind limb in a flexed position, with the metatarsus parallel to the ground for several minutes. Increased lameness afterwards is considered a positive test for spavin (a bony enlargement of the hock of a horse associated with lameness). (p. 64)

**Milk fever** is not a fever. Milk fever occurs whenever a cow is unable to mobilize calcium from her body stores fast enough to meet her milk secretion needs. (p. 96)

**Foundering** is the colloquial name for laminitis. Laminitis is a swelling inside the horse's foot. Because it is inside the foot, the swelling creates special problems mostly because the hoof is a rigid structure that surrounds a bone. The only place that can swell is between the hoof wall and the bone where the blood supply passes through to nourish the foot. (p. 102)

**Choke** is the common name for an obstruction of the oesophagus of a horse. (p. 190)



# Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story in a journal format? Did you like this format? Why or why not? Have you read any other works that feature a similar device?
2. The mention of spaceships and the arrival of the spaceman introduce a supernatural element to the novel that contradicts the natural (seasons, animals). Do you see these as polar worlds, or as intersecting? Does the supernatural play a role in other elements of the book? What is the meaning of the spacecraft in the novel?
3. What was your reaction to "what the wife cooked for dinner"? Why does the novel spend so much time discussing and describing food? Are there any food ideas you would like to try?
4. What are some of the coping mechanisms the characters use when facing death and mortality?
5. The main character is both a veterinarian and a hunter. How does he justify these two seemingly contradictory activities? What is it about the human psyche that allows for those two activities to exist at the same time? Can you point to similar contradictions in your own life?
6. In *The Call*, our sense of time passing is very much connected to the changing seasons. How would you characterize this "natural" approach to time? Is the way time passes for the family in *The Call* unique, or does this represent for you an accurate depiction of the way time goes by?
7. As evidenced by the author bio, elements of this story are autobiographical. Why do you think the wife is not a more prominent character, given her relationship to the author? How does Jen appear in the novel?
8. How does this book answer the question of what "family" really means? How do you see this family evolving over the course of the novel? Did the spaceman drastically change the family dynamic for you? Why or why not?



## Discussion Questions

9. The life portrayed in *The Call* is certainly distinctive, but routine is also a part of the family's daily life, as it is for most of us. Can you give examples of "calls" in your own life? What rhythms can you identify?
10. The father has many hobbies aside from his main work, including German and swimming. Did these activities inform your reading of him as a character? If so, how?
11. On page 6, the father says, "I could have been an engineer or a fighter pilot." Do you think the father is happy with his choice of career? Why or why not?
12. How does David's journal reflect his concerns about the contemporary age?
13. How does David emerge as a character?
14. Why is David so obsessed with finding out who shot his son? Why does Mark (David's son) push David to find the hunter who shot his son? What causes David to let go of his anger at the hunter who shot his son?
15. What are your views on whether a sperm donor has the right to remain anonymous? Should the donor be free of responsibility to the offspring produced by his sperm?
16. What do you think of the way that David raises his children? What are the differences in parenting styles between David and Jen?
17. Why do you think David calls Mark "the spaceman?"



## What the Wife Cooked for Dinner:

### Red Flannel Hash

Red flannel hash is just corned beef hash with the addition of beets. It's traditionally made in New England for breakfast, with leftovers from a boiled dinner the night before, and gets its name from the somewhat obvious similarity of its colors to red flannel plaid cloth.

Red Flannel Hash Recipe is from [www.simplyrecipes.com](http://www.simplyrecipes.com).

### Ingredients

4 tbsp. butter  
1 cup chopped onion  
2 cups chopped cooked corn beef  
1 1/2 cups chopped cooked beets  
1 1/2 cups chopped cooked potatoes  
1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce  
1/4 cup (packed) chopped fresh parsley (optional)  
Freshly ground black pepper to taste

### Method

1. Heat butter in a frying pan (cast iron preferred) on medium high heat. Add the onions and cook a couple minutes, until translucent.

2. Add the corned beef, potatoes, and beets. Stir in the pan to combine, and spread out evenly in the pan. Reduce the heat to medium. Press down with a metal spatula to help brown the mixture. Don't stir, but just let cook until nicely browned on one side, then use a metal spatula to lift up sections of the mixture and turn over to brown the other side. If the mixture sticks to the pan too much, just add a little more butter to the pan where it's sticking.

3. When nicely browned, remove from heat. Sprinkle in some Worcestershire sauce, if using. Stir in fresh chopped parsley, if using, and sprinkle on freshly ground black pepper to taste. There should be enough salt from the corned beef, but if not, add salt to taste. Serve plain or with fried or poached eggs. **Yield:** Serves 4.





# What the Wife Cooked for Dinner:

## Anadama Bread

The bread – based on cornmeal and molasses – dates back to Cape Ann, Massachusetts, in the early part of the 20th century. It is a dense, dark bread, a little sweet from the molasses, and it is very, very good with butter and cinnamon. Recipe is from [www.simplyrecipes.com](http://www.simplyrecipes.com)

### Ingredients

- 1/2 cup cornmeal
- 2 cups water
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 3 Tbsp butter (at room temperature)
- 1 Tbsp salt
- 1/2 cup warm water
- 1 package dry yeast
- 4 1/2 cups bread flour



### Method

1. Place the cornmeal in a large bowl. Boil the two cups of water and pour the hot water into the cornmeal, stirring constantly to prevent lumps. Let sit for 30 minutes.
2. Add the molasses, salt and butter and stir to combine. The cornmeal water should still be warm enough to melt the room temperature butter.
3. Put 1/2 cup of warm water (slightly warmer than body temperature) into a small bowl. Sprinkle the yeast over the water and let sit for a few minutes. Then stir it to gently combine. Let sit for another 5 minutes.
4. Add the yeast and the water to the bowl with the cornmeal and everything else, and mix to combine. Add the bread flour, a cup at a time, stirring after each addition. You will end up with something of a gloopy mess.
5. Butter a couple of 5x9 loaf pans. Spoon the dough mixture into the pans as best you can; it'll be sticky. Cover with a tea towel and let rise for several hours, until it doubles in size.
6. Heat the oven to 350°F and bake the breads for 45-50 minutes, or until a skewer or knife blade comes out clean. Let the loaves cool for a few minutes, then turn them out onto racks to continue cooling.

**Yield:** Makes 2 loaves



# What the Wife Cooked for Dinner:

## Nut Loaf

### Ingredients

- 2 large onions, finely chopped
- 1 cup chopped fresh mushrooms
- 1/4 cup finely chopped green pepper
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 cups grated carrots
- 1 1/2 cups chopped celery
- 5 eggs, beaten
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts
- 1/4 cup unsalted sunflower kernels
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 3 cups soft whole wheat bread crumbs



### Directions

1. In a nonstick skillet, saute onions, mushrooms and green pepper in butter until tender. In a bowl, combine the mushroom mixture, carrots, celery, eggs, walnut, sunflower kernels, salt, basil, oregano and pepper. Stir in bread crumbs.
2. Coat a 9-in. x 5-in. x 3-in. loaf pan with nonstick cooking spray, then line with waxed paper. Transfer vegetable mixture to a prepared pan. Bake at 350°F for 1 hour or until a meat thermometer reads 160°F. Let stand for 10 min before slicing.

Recipe from [www.allrecipes.com](http://www.allrecipes.com)



# What the Wife Cooked for Dinner:

## Gypsy soup

Source: "Moosewood Cookbook," by Mollie Katzen

Serves: 6 to 8

### Ingredients

- 3-4 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cups chopped onion
- 2 cloves crushed garlic
- 2 cups chopped, peeled sweet potatoes or winter squash
- 1/2 cup chopped celery
- 1 cup chopped fresh tomatoes
- 3/4 cup chopped sweet peppers
- 1-1/2 cups cooked chickpeas
- 3 cups stock or water
- Dash of cinnamon, dash of cayenne
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tablespoon tamari
- 2 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon basil
- 1 teaspoon salt



### Directions

In a soup kettle sauté onions, garlic, celery, and sweet potatoes in olive oil for about 5 minutes.

Add seasonings, except the tamari, and the stock or water. Simmer, covered for 15 minutes.

Add remaining vegetables and cooked chickpeas. Simmer another 10 minutes or so until all the vegetables are as tender as you like them.

Note: the vegetables used in this soup are flexible. Any orange vegetable can be combined with green. For example, peas or green beans can replace the peppers. Carrots can be used instead of or in addition to the squash or sweet potatoes.



## Further Reading

*Birds of a Lesser Paradise* by Megan Mayhew Bergman (March 2012 publication date)  
A debut story collection about the world's animals.

*Before You Know Kindness* by Chris Bohjalian

After a decade of spending a delightful summer week at their country house in New Hampshire, the members of the extended Seton family are confronted by a terrible shooting accident, testing the values and relationships that hold them together.

*Await Your Reply* by Dan Chaon

While Miles pursues elusive letters and clues in a perpetual search for his missing twin, Ryan struggles with the discovery that he is adopted, and Lucy finds her daring escape from her hometown posing unexpectedly dangerous consequences.

*Mr. Peanut* by Adam Ross

Although he deeply loves his wife of thirteen years, David obsessively contemplates her demise. When she dies, David is the chief suspect. The detectives investigating the suspicious death have marital issues of their own.

*Blame* by Michelle Huneven

Patsy MacLemoore, a history professor in her late twenties with a brand-new Ph.D. from Berkeley and a wild streak, wakes up in jail--yet again--after another epic alcoholic blackout. However, this time two people are dead, and Patsy had been driving with a revoked license. She will spend the rest of her life in prison, getting sober, finding a new community and husband, and trying to atone for this unpardonable act.

*Light on Snow* by Anita Shreve

Remembering the December afternoon twenty years earlier when her father and she found an abandoned infant in the snow, Nicky recalls her father's efforts to escape society after a tragedy and a young woman's struggles to live with her choices.

*Vanishing Acts* by Jodi Picoult

Working with the Search and Rescue bloodhound team to find missing people, single mother Delia Hopkins anticipates her upcoming nuptials, until a series of unsettling flashbacks threatens to devastate her life and the lives of those she loves.