Contemporary
Literary Criticism

GLC 2286

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers





Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 286

Project Editor: Jeffrey W. Hunter Editorial: Dana Ramel Barnes, Lindsey J. Bryant, Maria Carter-Ewald, Kathy D. Darrow, Kristen Dorsch, Jelena O. Krstović, Michelle Lee, Lawrence J. Trudeau

Content Conversion: Katrina Coach, Gwen Tucker

Indexing Services: Laurie Andriot Rights and Acquisitions: Sari Gordon, Jackie Jones, Kelly Quin

Composition and Electronic Capture: Gary Oudersluys

Manufacturing: Cynde Lentz

Associate Product Manager: Marc Cormier

© 2010 Gale, Cengage Learning

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced, transmitted, stored, or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording, scanning, digitizing, taping, Web distribution, information networks, or information storage and retrieval systems, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

This publication is a creative work fully protected by all applicable copyright laws, as well as by misappropriation, trade secret, unfair competition, and other applicable laws. The authors and editors of this work have added value to the underlying factual material herein through one or more of the following: unique and original selection, coordination, expression, arrangement, and classification of the information.

For product information and technology assistance, contact us at Gale Customer Support, 1-800-877-4253.

For permission to use material from this text or product,

submit all requests online at www.cengage.com/permissions.

Further permissions questions can be emailed to permissionrequest@cengage.com

While every effort has been made to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. Gale accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

Gale 27500 Drake Rd. Farmington Hills, MI, 48331-3535

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN-13: 978-1-4144-3982-2 ISBN-10: 1-4144-3982-2

ISSN 0091-3421

Preface

amed "one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years" by Reference Quarterly, the Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC) series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of CLC in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. CLC, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today's reader.

Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author's career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author's works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

Organization of the Book

A CLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The Author Heading cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Singlework entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of Further Reading appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Indexes

A Cumulative Author Index lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *CLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A Cumulative Nationality Index lists all authors featured in *CLC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *CLC* volume in which their entry appears.

A Cumulative Topic Index lists the literary themes and topics treated in the series as well as in other Literature Criticism series.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, films, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual cumulative title index that alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in *CLC* and is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

Citing Contemporary Literary Criticism

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

James, Harold. "Narrative Engagement with Atonement and The Blind Assassin." Philosophy and Literature 29, no. 1 (April 2005): 130-45. Reprinted in Contemporary Literary Criticism. Vol. 246, edited by Jeffrey W. Hunter, 188-95. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

Wesley, Marilyn C. "Anne Hèbert: The Tragic Melodramas." In *Canadian Women Writing Fiction*, edited by Mickey Pearlman, 41-52. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Vol. 246, edited by Jeffrey W. Hunter, 276-82. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 5th ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

James, Harold. "Narrative Engagement with Atonement and The Blind Assassin." Philosophy and Literature 29.1 (April 2005): 130-45. Reprinted in Contemporary Literary Criticism. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 246. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 188-95.

Wesley, Marilyn C. "Anne Hèbert: The Tragic Melodramas." *Canadian Women Writing Fiction*, edited by Mickey Pearlman. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993. 41-52. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 246. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 276-82.

Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Associate Product Manager:

Associate Product Manager, Literary Criticism Series
Gale
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
1-800-347-4253 (GALE)

Fax: 248-699-8983

Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *CLC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *CLC*, VOLUME 286, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:

The American Prospect, v. 11, June 5, 2000. Copyright © 2000 The American Prospect, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission from The American Prospect, 11 Beacon Street, Suite 1120, Boston, MA 02108.—American Review of Canadian Studies, v. 36, winter, 2006. Reproduced by permission.—Atlantis, v. 26, June, 2004. © 2004 Spanish Association for Anglo American Studies (AEOFAN). Reproduced by permission of Asociacion Espanola de Estudios Anglo-Norteamericanos (AEDEAN).—The Booklist, v. 105, May 1, 2009. Copyright © 2009 by the American Library Association. Reproduced by permission.—boundary 2, v. 26, summer, 1999; v. 33, summer, 2006. Copyright, 1999, 2006, Duke University Press. All rights reserved. All used by permission of the publisher—Critical Survey, v. 18, 2006. Copyright © 2006 by Critical Survey. Republished with permission of Berghahn Books, Inc., conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.—Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, v. 40, fall, 1998. Copyright © 1998 by Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Reproduced with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation, published by Heldref Publications, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1802.—Ecotone: Reimagining Place, v. 1, spring, 2006. Reproduced by permission.—Essays in Theatre/Etudes Théâtrales, v. 11, May, 1993 for "Desire and Difference in Liz Lochhead's Dracula," by Jennifer Harvie. Reproduced by permission of the author.—French Forum, v. 33, winter/ spring, 2008. Copyright © 2008 by the University of Nebraska Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the University of Nebraska Press.—Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide, v. 16, May-June, 2009. Reproduced by permission.— The Hudson Review, v. 57, summer, 2004. Copyright © 2004 by The Hudson Review, Inc. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment, v. 7, summer, 2000; v. 15, winter, 2008. All reproduced by permission.—The James White Review: A Gay Men's Literary Quarterly, an imprint of White Crane Institute, v. 17, January, 2000. Reproduced by permission.—Journal of European Studies, v. 34, 2004. Copyright © 2004 by SAGE Publications. Originally published in Vacarme, 14, hiver 2001. Reproduced by permission of Sage Publications and the authors.—Journal of Modern Literature, v. 31, spring, 2008. Copyright © 2008 Indiana University Press. Reproduced by permission.—Journal of the American Studies Association of Texas, v. 26, October, 1995. Copyright © 1995 American Studies Association. Reproduced by permission.—L'Esprit Créateur, v. 42, fall, 2002. Copyright © 2002 by L'Esprit Créateur. Reproduced by permission.—Language and Literature, v. 13, 2004. Copyright © 2004 by Sage Publications. Reproduced by permission of Sage Publications, Inc., conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.— Los Angeles Times Book Review, June 29, 2008. Reproduced by permission.—Midwestern Miscellany, v. 27, fall, 1999 for "James Purdy's Gertrude (1997): A Visit to Chicago Painter Gertrude Abercrombie (1909-1977) in Hades," by Paul W. Miller. Copyright © 1999 by the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—Modern Drama, v. 35, September, 1992. Copyright © 1992 by the University of Toronto, Graduate Centre for Study of Drama. Reproduced by permission.—The Nation, v. 270, April 17, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by The Nation Magazine/The Nation Company, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—New Literary History, v. 37, autumn, 2006. Copyright © 2006 by The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reproduced by permission.—New Statesman, v. 13, April 3, 2000. Copyright © 2000 New Statesman, Ltd. Reproduced by permission.—Notes on Contemporary Literature, v. 38, May, 2008. Copyright 2008 by William S. Doxey. Reproduced by permission.—Novel: A Forum on Fiction, v. 20, autumn, 1986. Copyright, 1986, Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Used by permission of the publisher.—PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art, v. 20, May, 1998. Copyright © 1998 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Reproduced by permission of The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.—Paragraph: The Journal of the Modern Critical Theory Group, v. 30, July, 2007. Copyright © Edinburgh University Press Ltd. 2007. Reproduced by permission.—Public Libraries, v. 40, January/February, 2001. Copyright © 2001 by the American Library Association. Reproduced by permission.—Publishers Weekly, v. 252, March 21, 2005; v. 253, July 17, 2006. Copyright © 2005, 2006 by Reed Publishing USA. All reproduced from Publishers Weekly, published by the Bowker Magazine Group of Cahners Publishing Co., a division of Reed Publishing USA, by permission—Quarterly Review of Film and Video, v. 20, 2003 for "The Spatial Politics of Racial and Cultural Identity in Claire Denis' Chocolat," by Janice Morgan. Copyright © 2003 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC., conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis,

Ltd., http//:www.tandf.co.uk/journals and the author.—Senses of Cinema, no. 36, July-September, 2005. Copyright 2005 Senses of Cinema, Inc. and the contributors. Reproduced by permission.—Studies in French Cinema, v. 8, 2008. Copyright © Intellect Ltd 2008. All reproduced by permission.—Studies in Short Fiction, v. 25, winter, 1988. Copyright © 1988 by Studies in Short Fiction. Reproduced by permission.—SubStance, v. 37, 2008. Copyright © 2008 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. Reproduced by permission of the University of Wisconsin Press.—University of Toronto Quarterly, v. 70, fall, 2001. Copyright © University of Toronto Press 2001. Reproduced by permission of University of Toronto Press Incorporated.—Weber: The Contemporary West, v. 11, fall, 1994. Reproduced by permission.—West Virginia University Philological Papers, v. 53, fall, 2006 for "Creativity and Destruction: Robert Kroetsch's Notikeewin Trilogy," by J'nan Morse Sellery. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—Willow Springs, winter/spring, 2004. © 2004 Willow Springs. Reproduced by permission.—Women in French Studies, 2006. Copyright © 2006 by Women in French Studies. Reproduced by permission.—World Literature Today, v. 73, spring, 1999. Copyright © 1999 by World Literature Today. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *CLC*, VOLUME 286, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:

Adams, Stephen. From "Gothic Love: Truman Capote, Carson McCullers and James Purdy," in The Homosexual as Hero in Contemporary Fiction. Edited by Stephen Adams. Barnes & Noble Books, 1980. Copyright © 1980 by Stephen Adams. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Branch, Michael P. From "Jeremiad, Elegy, and the Yaak: Rick Bass and the Aesthetics of Anger and Grief," in The Literary Art and Activism of Rick Bass. Edited by O. Alan Weltzien. The University of Utah Press, 2001. © 2001 The University of Utah Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.— Braun-Hansen, Anne-Kathrin. From "Resignifying HiStories: The Subversive Potential of Revision in Liz Lochhead's Poetry," in Ethically Speaking: Voice and Values in Modern Scottish Writing. Edited by James McGonigal and Kirsten Stirling. Rodopi, 2006. Copyright © 2006 Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam. Reproduced by permission.—Fisher-Wirth, Ann. From "Storied Earth, Storied Lives: Linda Hogan's Solar Storms and Rick Bass's The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness." in From the Center of Tradition: Critical Perspectives on Linda Hogan. Edited by Barbara J. Cook. University Press of Colorado, 2003. Copyright © 2003 by the University Press of Colorado. All rights reserved. Republished with permission of University Press of Colorado, conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.—Gifford, Terry. From The Literary Art and Activism of Rick Bass. The University of Utah Press, 2001. Copyright © 2001 by the University of Utah Press, All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Kabitoglou, E. Douka. From "Blood Sisters: Mary Shelley, Liz Lochhead, and the Monster," in Mary Shelley in Her Times. Edited by Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran. The John Hopkins University Press, 2000. Copyright © 2000 The Johns Hopkins University Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—McDonald, Jan. From "The Devil is Beautiful': Dracula: Freudian Novel and Feminist Drama," in Novel Images: Literature in Performance. Edited by Peter Reynolds. Routledge, 1993. Individual chapters © 1993 Routledge. Individual chapters © 1993 the respective contributors. All rights reserved. Republished with permission of Taylor & Francis, New York, conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.—Miller, Paul W. From "James Purdy's Fiction as Shaped by the American Midwest: The Chicago Novels," in American Literature in Belgium. Edited by Gilbert Debusscher. Rodopi, 1988. Copyright © 1988 Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam. Reproduced by permission.—Rudy, Susan. From "The Desperate Love Story That Poetry Is': Robert Kroetsch's The Hornbooks of Rita K," in Writing in Our Time: Canada's Radical Poetries in English (1957-2003). Edited by Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy. Wilfrid Laurier University Press. 2005. Copyright © 2005 Wilfrid Laurier University Press. Reproduced by permission.—Stevenson, Randall. From "Triumphant Tartuffification: Liz Lochhead's Translation of Moliere's Tartuffe," in Frae Ither Tongues: Essays on Modern Translations into Scots. Edited by Bill Findlay. Multilingual Matters Limited, 2004. Copyright © 2004 Bill Findlay and the authors of individual chapters. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Varty, Anne, From "The Mirror and the Vamp: Liz Lochhead," in A History of Scottish Women's Writing. Edited by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan. Edinburgh University Press, 1997. Copyright © The contributors, 1997. Reproduced by permission. www.euppublishing.com.

Gale Literature Product Advisory Board

The members of the Gale Literature Product Advisory Board—reference librarians from public and academic library systems—represent a cross-section of our customer base and offer a variety of informed perspectives on both the presentation and content of our literature products. Advisory board members assess and define such quality issues as the relevance, currency, and usefulness of the author coverage, critical content, and literary topics included in our series; evaluate the layout, presentation, and general quality of our printed volumes; provide feedback on the criteria used for selecting authors and topics covered in our series; provide suggestions for potential enhancements to our series; identify any gaps in our coverage of authors or literary topics, recommending authors or topics for inclusion; analyze the appropriateness of our content and presentation for various user audiences, such as high school students, undergraduates, graduate students, librarians, and educators; and offer feedback on any proposed changes/enhancements to our series. We wish to thank the following advisors for their advice throughout the year.

Barbara M. Bibel

Librarian
Oakland Public Library
Oakland, California

Dr. Toby Burrows

Principal Librarian
The Scholars' Centre
University of Western Australia Library
Nedlands, Western Australia

Celia C. Daniel

Associate Reference Librarian Howard University Libraries Washington, D.C.

David M. Durant

Reference Librarian Joyner Library East Carolina University Greenville, North Carolina

Nancy T. Guidry

Librarian Bakersfield Community College Bakersfield, California

Heather Martin

Arts & Humanities Librarian University of Alabama at Birmingham, Sterne Library Birmingham, Alabama

Susan Mikula

Librarian Indiana Free Library Indiana, Pennsylvania

Thomas Nixon

Humanities Reference Librarian
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Davis
Library
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Mark Schumacher

Jackson Library University of North Carolina at Greensboro Greensboro, North Carolina

Gwen Scott-Miller

Assistant Director Sno-Isle Regional Library System Marysville, Washington

Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

American short fiction writer, essayist, novelist, author of nonfiction, and memoirist	1
Claire Denis 1948- French director and screenwriter	73
Robert Kroetsch 1927- Canadian novelist, poet, essayist, and author of nonfiction	153
Liz Lochhead 1947- Scottish playwright, poet, dramatist, and screenwriter	222
James Purdy 1914	298

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 385

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 501

CLC Cumulative Nationality Index 517

CLC-286 Title Index 533

Rick Bass

American short fiction writer, essayist, novelist, author of nonfiction, and memoirist.

The following entry presents an overview of Bass's career through 2009. For additional information on his life and works, see *CLC*, Volumes 79 and 143.

INTRODUCTION

Bass is recognized as one of the foremost writers of environmentally aware fiction and nonfiction. He is known for his introspective writing style and acute observational skills, which he has readily applied to his stories and novels, as well as his essays, journals, and conservationist tracts. Frequently set in the American South, Southwest, and Pacific Northwest, Bass's works express a profound connection to nature, disdain for the forces that seek to alter it for commercial gain, and a nostalgic attitude toward the untouched wilds of a bygone era. The sensitivity with which Bass has addressed ecological concerns is likewise evident in his portrayal of human interactions and his regard for the place of humanity within America's surviving wilderness.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The son of C. R. Bass, a geologist, and Mary Lucy Robson Bass, a schoolteacher, Bass was born in Fort Worth, Texas. He spent many of his formative years in the Texas hill country where his grandfather maintained a deer ranch. His experiences there became the basis for his first published book, the essay collection The Deer Pasture (1985). He graduated from Utah State University in 1979 with a B.S. in petroleum geology, and from 1979 to 1987 he worked as a petroleum geologist in Jackson, Mississippi. After reading Jim Harrison's novel Legends of the Fall, Bass became inspired to try his hand at writing. His first published short story, "Where the Sea Used to Be," appeared in the Paris Review in 1987, and his works of ecologically based nonfiction began to be published regularly in such notable periodicals as Esquire, the Quarterly, and the Southern Review around the same time. Also in 1987, Bass moved with his wife, artist Elizabeth Hughes, and their two daughters to a ranch in the remote Yaak Valley of northern Montana, which is part of the Kootenai National Forest. His fervent support for the preservation of Yaak Valley led him into the sphere of environmental activism. He received the General Electric Younger Writers Award for the story "Wild Horses" and a James Jones First Novel Fellowship for Where the Sea Used to Be (1998). Bass's story collection The Lives of Rocks (2006) was a finalist for The Story Prize, and his tale "The Canoeists" received a Pushcart Prize. His memoir Why I Came West (2008) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

MAJOR WORKS

Told in straightforward yet poetically informed language, Bass's fiction deals with the interdependence of humanity and nature, addressing the delicate balance between the two that must be maintained for both to survive. The three novellas that comprise The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness (1997) explore the interrelationship of the natural world, humanity, and spirituality. The first novella, The Myths of Bears, depicts a man who literally tracks his runaway wife through the wintry Canadian wilderness. The narrative follows the troubled couple as they enact their roles of prey and predator. In the second novella, Where the Sea Used to Be, a young petroleum geologist competes with his rivals at a large oil company to map oil wells on the Mississippi landscape. Where the Sea Used to Be was expanded to become Bass's first novel. In the titular novella, a woman recounts her experiences growing up on her family's Texas ranch. The ten tales in The Hermit's Story (2002) focus on the fundamental ties that bind individuals to the land and each other and examine the complex connections that endow the familiar world with the enigmatic quality of myth. In 2005 Bass ventured into new territory with the historical novel The Diezmo. Based on a little-known chapter in Texas history, the novel takes place in 1842, after Texas had become an independent nation but before it had joined the United States. Sent on a mission to avenge the Mexican attack on the Alamo, five hundred armed Texans cross the Rio Grande and begin laying waste to the countryside. Upon being captured by the Mexican army, the Texans are starved, subjected to disease and torture, and assigned to difficult manual labor. Their dwindling numbers are further whittled

1

down by a practice called "the diezmo"—a random lottery in which one out of every ten men is chosen for immediate execution. The short fiction collected in The Lives of Rocks combines elements of spare authenticity with the fantastic quality of magical realism. The novella Fiber, which was also published separately in 1998, is told from the perspective of an environmental activist who loads naturally fallen trees onto the trucks of loggers so that they will cut down fewer living trees. Calling himself the "log fairy," the protagonist breaks the traditional boundaries of narrative, addressing the reader and questioning the usefulness of his own tale. In "Cats and Students, Bubbles and Abysses," an egotistical writing instructor at a iunior college brazenly destroys his students' composition papers because he cannot stand their lack of talent. As the story unfolds, this injurious act sheds light on the instructor's feelings about his own aspirations as a writer

Bass's nonfiction traces the development of his ecological and personal awareness, combining impassioned observations of the natural world with intimate personal reflection. Written in journal form, Oil Notes (1989) describes his career as a petroleum geologist, offering lyrical meditations on the art and science of finding energy in the ground, as well as ruminations on the author's personal life and outdoor adventures. Blending facts, interviews, and biology, The Ninemile Wolves (1992) explores the reintroduction of wolves into the American West and the precariously balanced relationship between humans and the environment. The Book of Yaak (1996) blends statistics and poetic language in a description of the beleaguered Yaak Valley and outlines the author's attempts to conserve the region. These essays give voice to Bass's outrage and grief concerning the vanishing wilderness and its species, while addressing the contentious, yet steadfast, connection between art and activism. Brown Dog of the Yaak (1999) continues this contemplation, linking the intuitive impulse to create art to Bass's hunting experiences with his dog Colter and his ties to the land. The Wild Marsh (2009) documents a year of Bass's life in the Yaak Valley, celebrating the surrounding wilderness as a place of awe and inspiration, while simultaneously acknowledging the difficulties of living a remote, rural existence. Why I Came West balances autobiographical material with grief-stricken yet resolute observations on the commercial development of the Yaak Valley.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Perhaps because many critics have categorized Bass as a "nature writer"—a label that the author has adamantly resisted for its restrictive connotations—a

disparity has existed between his widespread reputation and the limited scholarly response to his work. Recently, however, reviewers have begun to emphasize Bass's place within the established tradition of ecofiction and environmental criticism. For example, they have favorably compared The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness to Native American author Linda Hogan's 1995 novel Solar Storms for its themes concerning the search for a mother and the journey into wilderness. In addition, they have cited the ideals of nineteenthcentury frontier advocate Frederick Jackson Turner as a source for Oil Notes. Commentators have also interpreted the protagonist of "Cats and Students, Bubbles and Abysses" as an embodiment of educator Peter Elbow's individualistic, nonacademic attitude toward the teaching of writing. Moreover, critics have analyzed the self-referential aspects of Fiber, as well as its fusion of fiction and nonfiction. Commentator O. Alan Weltzien has interpreted the duality between fact and fantasy as a structural or formal metaphor for the tension between the obligations of activism and art, a conflict upon which Bass has often commented in his work. According to Weltzien, "The challenge has become one of containment and form. For writers in love with the natural world, how to manage that contentious, committed marriage of art and activism?" Furthermore, reviewers have heralded Fiber as a spiritually potent exercise in a new form of nature writing that infuses standard ecological concerns with a dynamic postmodern sensibility. As critical approbation of Bass's work continues to grow, scholarly consensus echoes Michael P. Branch's contention that by "unlocking and exploring the emotions of anger and grief that are induced by environmental loss, Bass uses literary art to heighten our awareness, to inspire us."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

The Deer Pasture (essays) 1985 Wild to the Heart (essays) 1987

Oil Notes (journals) 1989

The Watch: Stories (short stories) 1989

Winter: Notes from Montana (nonfiction) 1991 The Ninemile Wolves: An Essay (essay) 1992

Platte River (short stories) 1994

The Lost Grizzlies: A Search for Survivors in the Wilderness of Colorado (nonfiction) 1995

The Book of Yaak (essays) 1996

The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness (novellas) 1997

Fiber (novella) 1998

The New Wolves (essay) 1998

Where the Sea Used to Be (novel) 1998

Brown Dog of the Yaak: Essays on Art and Activism (essays) 1999

Colter: The True Story of the Best Dog I Ever Had (nonfiction) 2000

The Hermit's Story: Stories (short stories) 2002

The Roadless Yaak: Reflections and Observations about One of Our Last Great Wild Places [editor] (essays) 2002

The Diezmo (novel) 2005

The Lives of Rocks: Stories (short stories) 2006

Why I Came West (memoir) 2008

The Wild Marsh: Four Seasons at Home in Montana

(nonfiction) 2009

CRITICISM

Rick Bass and Scott Slovic (interview date 23 March 1993)

SOURCE: Bass, Rick, and Scott Slovic. "A Paint Brush in One Hand and a Bucket of Water in the Other: Nature Writing and the Politics of Wilderness: An Interview with Rick Bass." *Weber Studies* 11, no. 3 (fall 1994): 11-29.

[In the following interview, which was conducted March 23, 1993, Bass discusses his writing process and schedule, engagement with the natural world, and experience with the politics of wildlife conservation.]

"Suppose you are given a bucket of water," Rick Bass has written. "You're standing there holding it. Your home's on fire. Will you pour the cool water over the flames or will you sit there and write a poem about it?" Thus he poses what is, for him, the nature writer's chief dilemma: "literature versus politics."

The author of five volumes of nonfiction and two collections of short stories, Rick Bass—storyteller, rhapsodist, and polemicist—is Edward Abbey's heir apparent as the literary defender of wilderness in the American West. Born in 1958, Rick grew up in Houston, Texas, and first experienced the lure of nature and the power of storytelling during visits to his family's deer lease in the Texas hill country, west of Austin. When he attended college at Utah State University, his goal was not to become a writer, but to study anything that would enable him to spend time in the woods—he ended up majoring in petroleum geology, along the way taking Thomas J. Lyon's workshop on essay writing. In 1987, he and Elizabeth Hughes whose pen-and-ink drawings appear in several of Rick's books-moved to the remote Yaak Valley in

northwestern Montana, not far from the Canadian border, where they still live with their two-year-old daughter in a mountainous area without paved roads or telephones.

The Deer Pasture, Rick's series of nostalgic essays about hunting with his family in Central Texas, was published in 1985. Two years later he published Wild to the Heart, a collection of essays about wilderness experiences throughout the country, frequently exuberant escapes to mountains and rivers during short breaks from his job in Jackson, Mississippi. Rick published two books in 1989: Oil Notes, an account of his work as a petroleum geologist, and The Watch, his first collection of short fiction. Winter: Notes from Montana, a journal from his first year in the Yaak Valley, appeared in 1991. A year later, Rick published The Ninemile Wolves, a book about the reintroduction of wild wolves in Montana that marks his increasing involvement with wilderness politics. Earlier this year, Platte River, a second collection of fiction, appeared. Rick Bass's many literary awards include the General Electric Younger Writers Award, a PEN/Nelson Algren Award Special Citation for fiction, and a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship.

This interview was taped in San Marcos, Texas, on 23 March 1993, while Rick was back in his home state to do an article on the hill country for *Nature Conservancy*.

[Slovic]: Let's start by discussing the connections or distinctions between fiction and nonfiction—the two genres you typically work in. You mention your friend Kirby in at least two of your books of nonfiction—Oil Notes and Winter—and he and Tricia also appear with their real names as characters in some of the stories in The Watch. Does this mean that short stories like "Mexico" and "Redfish" are really "essays"—that is, nonfiction? How is it that "real life" and real individuals with their actual names can move so freely back and forth between your work in supposedly different genres?

[Bass]: Well, I usually don't like to talk about it because it leads to a self-awareness or self-consciousness about process which can really mess you up. What I think I need to do is feel what I'm feeling about a story. But it is of course a very valid question.

Would you dispense with the discussion of genres altogether?

Well, I'd dispense with it real quickly, and I would say that it has to do mostly with the feeling you bring to the subject. If you come in wanting to prove something, or come in with a certain amount of knowledge beforehand, it's going to lean more towards nonfiction, and if you come in totally lost, just with some feeling, there's a good chance it's going to take off in the direction of fiction. And that's all there is to me.

Does that tend to determine which genre you work in? As you sit down to write, you may not even have fixed your plans for one genre or another—it depends how definite your idea, your feeling, about the subject matter is.

Right. I sit down at the desk and I'm feeling something, and if I have a good idea what it is I'm feeling, it'll probably be nonfiction. That's not to say nonfiction doesn't have discovery or revelation, but more often than not these days in my nonfiction I'm just trying to say something that I feel already, that I know—I'm trying to save something, I'm trying to stop something, or I'm trying to celebrate something. I'm writing about something I'm familiar with. If I sit down just totally lost—if I just have a strange feeling or a strange idea, a strange mysterious emotion, then that's good fertile ground for fiction. And whether the elements or the characters in it are things or people I know or don't know, or whether it's things that I've done or haven't done, is irrelevant. It's more the feeling that I bring to the paper when I sit down, and that's about as far as I'd take it. So yeah, it's irrelevant and I think the more you talk about it, the more aware you become of it.

There's a passage in your essay "River People" in which you describe your trip on the Nantahala River. You and your companions have just had a wonderful picnic, the perfect picnic, by the side of the river, and a kind of spell has been created. And you say that none of the participants wanted to analyze the feeling for fear of somehow ruining it. Is that how you feel about writing, too? That excessive analysis will interfere with it?

Yeah. For me it will. I'm not saying that it's wrong or right, but it's dead wrong for me and that's just that. And I'm lucky to have figured it out.

You say that when you go in to write a story—or to write anything—you put yourself at your desk and decide whether you have simply an amorphous idea or a firmer point you'd like to make. But you also apparently work from notes now and then. In fact, you've said in Oil Notes that the book itself emerges from the "little journal books" you carried around as a geologist—it's literally a collection of notes, and, as you say, "a whole lot of them are going to lack any structure at all, but if you know a geologist, you know that that is the way he expresses things." How has your work as a

note-taking geologist influenced your writing in general? Do you work from notes when doing nonfiction and less so when doing fiction? Or do you take notes sometimes that work their way into your fiction?

I use notes pretty much on everything these days just because I've got so much going that my focus can really be stressed.

Even the short story that you said you worked on last night and this morning—was that derived from notes?

It was from notes. It was called "Four Deer." I had anecdotes of observations of deer in the valley this year that were interesting. That's all I knew—I just knew that it had four elements, four different things that happened, so how could I make a story with those four things integral to the story. So yeah, I wrote down notes for that—but I originally thought that it was going to be nonfiction, and I think I would have reduced it. Then I got a letter from an editor asking if I had something short, some fiction. I thought, what do I have? Well, all I've got are these notes on these four deer. I knew what I knew about the four deer episodes, but I didn't even stop to ask myself what I didn't know. And so I thought about that and I thought about a fifth thing—one more thing that was unlike those four deer, which was a man-woman relationship I had observed. And I went from there, and wrote about something I didn't know or understand, and by the end of the story I did. And it didn't parallel those four deer, but it fit into their system of logic or into the system of those observations. Agh, I can't talk about this-

Yeah, it's hard to analyze this process. Let's move to another topic. Edward Abbey has written, in Desert Solitaire, that we need wild places even if we never go there, even if we never leave the confines of asphalt and right-angled spaces. Somehow I get the sense, though, that you could never be content without the opportunity to spend time in the actual, physical wilderness—is that true?

Yes, and I think it was true for Abbey. And when he said "we," I think he was speaking about mankind, and pretty much excluding himself.

What if, for some hypothetical reason, you found yourself obligated to be in a city like Houston or any city—

Forever?

Not forever, but for several months or half a year or a year. What kind of solace or vicarious satisfaction could you get by reading your books or someone else's books about wild places?

That's an interesting question. Basically, that's what I did the first twenty-five or twenty-seven years of my life. But, again, I was determined to take control and go to a place that I desired, or to a way of life that I desired.

Is this what you were doing in your early years as a writer while working in Jackson? Were you reading? I know that you were taking brief excursions, the ones that you recorded in Wild to the Heart, but were you also reading things and deriving some sort of alternative wilderness experience from those?

Well, I was, and that's a real nice question because a lot of the books I read to derive that alternative wilderness experience I wasn't living and yet was striving for were not so-called "nature writing." I mean, there were the works by Flannery O'Connor, which have plenty of wilderness experience in them, or wildness. And Eudora Welty and Barry Hannah and a lot of the southern writers. Just a lot of great books. Saul Bellow.

So there's something that seems to transcend the subject matter on the surface—a kind of wildness even in Saul Bellow's writing.

Sure. *Herzog*, where the goofy guy is running around on the airstrip. Yeah, definitely. I was not getting it in my life physically, in my walking across the land, and so I was yearning for it, and so yeah—it's kind of like i.v. or something in the hospital. You're not well, but you could be a hell of a lot sicker if you didn't have the tube in you.

So wilderness literature serves as a kind of saline solution that helps you survive until you can get to the real thing.

It helps slow down your atrophying, and if you get your act together, you can get out. Or if you stay on the tubes, you're eventually going to atrophy.

Much of your writing, it seems to me, explores the idea of what it means to be happy. At one point, in **Oil Notes**, you say, "I'm learning that you can't map happiness." Can you explain what you mean by that? Aren't you, as a writer, seeking paradoxically to "map" your happiness, to define it and account for it?

Yeah. Or I can try.

Is it right that your writing, to a great extent, is an effort to explore what it means to be happy?

I can't answer that. If it is, I'm not aware of it and don't really want to be aware of it. It might be more about the ability to control or the inability to control, and then you can make your peace with the relative inability to control the specifics of your life. You know, if you can give that up and learn to look at the smaller things and things other than yourself, I think some growth and happiness will come out of that. And I think you'll treat things better, treat the land better, treat each other better—

Is this one of the nebulous feelings that you often start a story with—

I'm sure so. It's not something I'd set out to prove or disprove. That's one reason I'm awkward and hesitant even to talk about it.

Is there something dubious about the very enterprise of interviewing a writer or being interviewed as a writer? Are there certain shadowed spaces that you'd prefer not to shed light on because that's where the creativity comes from?

There are for me. Yeah, that's it in a sentence. For me, anyway.

Do you think it might be different for writers who are critics, too? What do you find in your own conversations with writers? Do writers who are also critics shy away from analyzing their own work?

Good question. I don't ever ask anybody else about their work because I assume it would be so painful for them to go down and come up with something meaningful or relevant—I just wouldn't ever dream of asking them. I just read their work, but I'm sure there are writers out there—I don't know, there are all kinds of different writers. It's just that for me it can be real deadening, and I have to have basically pretty vast reserves of well-being and peace in order to talk about it. I don't even like to drink a lot anymore before an interview, which used to help a lot because it got me through the interview, but then I had double reserves to make up—I had to make up artistically or creatively for that which I had spent, but then I also had to get over the hangover, so it just set me two days back instead of maybe one day back. It does leave an echo rattling around in my skull if I talk about it.

I wonder if there are ways in which an interview, rather than being a kind of intrusion, could actually generate new ideas or chart new directions for you to explore things that would certainly not be exhausted through the conversation.

It happens occasionally, very rarely. But it happens enough to make it worth doing. And I feel like there's an obligation—if somebody is interested enough to read your interview or interested enough in your work

to want to hear something about it. I guess it feels like an obligation to me—it's part of the work. But I would be coy to say that it doesn't cost. It does—it does cost me, it always has, and I suspect it always will. But, like you say, I've gotten some good things out of interviews—or not always interviews, but sometimes out of book reviews or something. I had one posted on the board in my office for a long time—and it was very helpful for several years. It had to do with vitality, vitality in the human experience. That notion still stays with me, and it was nothing I had been conscious of, but I realized it was a part of my work and was an important part. But again, that can be the very danger to a writer—knowing too well the direction you're going.

Un-huh.

Shit, it's not as hard as digging a ditch. I mean, I'm whining about interviewing!

Just talking.

Yeah, just telling the truth. For better or worse.

At one point in Oil Notes, you say, "There are people I know who dabble, who want to write—no, who want to be writers. But they're married, or have children, or have a job, or watch the news. There's no time." Now that you're married and have a baby daughter, does it complicate the effort to find a balance between work and family? Barry Lopez also commented once in an interview that he writes about these trips to distant parts of the world, wild parts of the world, that other people who have busy jobs and families can't get to. What do you think about the complexity of trying to balance a family and your work as a writer?

I think finding a solution is complex, but the application is very easy. You get into a rhythm that fits your life and at that point it's easy—getting there may be hard.

So at this point, with your daughter, Mary Katherine, a year old, are you still trying to find that balance?

Well, I've had little trouble adapting to it. I've been real lucky. You know, writing is real important to me, the stories that I'm telling—but no more important than family or than myself, my time alone. Every bit as important to me as writing is being able to walk, especially in the summer and fall. I just walk all afternoon until dark. Yeah, it's important. Now the equation's changed with her, but I've found a balance, a schedule, a routine that works and that still allows me to devote as much energy to the family and to the woods as I do to the writing.

Do you walk more than you write?

Oh, goodness yes. Goodness yes.

So you walk maybe six or more hours a day.

Yeah, in the summer, usually eight and sometimes ten. And in the fall, usually more than six. At the short ends of the year, between four and six.

What do you do in the winter? Do you ski? How do you get out?

I ski. I don't ski for as long as I walk, but I get a lot of work done in the winter.

You said earlier this afternoon that you write for three, maybe three and a half, hours a day. During the winter, when you're kind of snowed in, do you spend more hours actually writing?

No, not really. Maybe thirty minutes more—maybe three and a half hours instead of three.

Is that just to make sure that you're always writing at a peak of freshness and attentiveness?

Yeah. Sure. Better for me to quit early than to go on too long, because I undo anything good that I've accomplished, I'll just unravel it. There's this point where, when I'm tired, I back off—I'm not focusing as hard and it's just like pulling a thread out and unraveling everything that came before. It's very destructive.

Are you working on a word processor?

No, just in a notebook.

And then you type up your work yourself?

Either I'll do it or have a typist do it.

Is Elizabeth still busy with her art? Is she also able to find time to work?

No, she's starting to—it's just taking longer. She's getting interested in pottery and has done a little bit of that. She's doing what she wants to do—she goes for walks with Mary Katherine.

Back to the idea of wildness and wilderness—but we'll try not to make it too abstract. One of your short stories that I like very much—partly because of its loving depiction of the Texas hill country near where we are right now—is the piece called "In the Loyal Mountains" [Southwest Review, Summer 1990]. Would you describe this place, the "Loyal Mountains" [located in the reallife Loyal Valley, north of Fredericksburg and about

eighty miles northwest of Austin], as a "wilderness"? Or is it too close—does remoteness from urban civilization have anything to do with how wild a place is? Can wildness happen even in a city park or in an area like the hill country, not too far from cities like Austin and San Antonio?

It depends not just on the individual, but on the time in that person's life. It depends on so many variables that—it sounds like a cop-out—I truly can't answer that other than yes and no.

You seem to be saying that the sense of what wilderness is depends on the individual's state of mind.

On the individual's state of mind at that moment. I mean, one day I can be on the back northeast corner of the Deer Pasture, and that place is wild just because it's the back corner and it's farthest away from camp, it's farthest away from anything, it's its own place. The boundaries and borders are set by the contours and geology, the outcrops, the vegetation, the whole ecotype—not by human prescription—so it's a wild place. At dusk it's a wild place. And when I've been hunting all day and come there to sit down and just rest and be quiet, it's a wild place. If I hit it at ten o'clock in the morning and I drove a jeep in to within a quarter-mile or something of it rather than having to hunt it all day, it is not a wild place—on that day. If I've been at home in Yaak for three or four months and have been out hiking every day, going back and forth, crossing into Canada, it's not a wild place—a wild place is not wild for me during that phase or that moment unless there's something in there that—like Doug Peacock says—"something that can kill and eat you." And it just differs from day to day and moment to moment.

I once heard Donald Hall, the writer who lives on a farm in New Hampshire, contrast his own lifestyle with that of Wendell Berry, in fact he was introducing Wendell Berry at the time—and he said something like, "I'm a writer who lives on a farm, and Berry is a writer who lives on a farm and not only writes, but actually works the land and has some kind of material engagement with the land beyond merely living there." What degree of contact or engagement with the land do you think is necessary for a rural writer? Would your relationship with the Yaak wilderness change if you began farming or ranching there? Or can you not even imagine doing something like that?

I can imagine it. Only if it were something I wanted to do, and it's not. It's not that I don't want to do it—it's just that what I want to do is walk in the woods, and so that's what I do and that's the way I engage with the landscape. If farming or ranching were what I

wanted to do, then it would be best for me as a writer to do that. There is a certain value to be gotten from repression—that is, from not doing the thing that you want to do with regard to your art, but I assume that we're talking on the scale of a life and not a year, and in the long run it's going to be better for both my life and my work if I engage myself with my subject—

Engage by way of walking. Is walking a similar sort of discipline—

No, it's not discipline—it's just an engagement, it's a form of touching the subject. For me, that has the sound of an old wives' tale or a myth—that one writes best about one's subject when only imagining it rather than being engaged in it. It just has that feel of bullshit to it. There's no rule or law I know of or that I've experienced in my life that says engagement with my subject is going to compromise my ability to imagine. If anything, it stimulates my imagination—it stimulates it wildly to get out and engage myself with the landscape and with the subject. That's the trouble with so much student art, student writing—it's too detached, it is not engaged.

A few years ago, Don Mitchell published a short essay called "Dancing with Nature" [The Bread Loaf Anthology of Contemporary American Essays, 1989], in which he criticizes nature writers who do not also work, by way of agriculture or something else, in order to subsist from the very land that they're writing about. I sense that you're suggesting that that isn't necessarily a valid argument. Maybe even a writer's work is a means of subsistence, maybe even when the writer walks, or even sits and observes—

Yeah, that movie—Barton Fink both makes fun of and praises "the life of the mind." I mean, the life of the mind can be made fun of, but it still exists—it's not as strenuous or physically rigorous an existence as the life of the lower back, but it is still a life if you allow it to be, if you engage in your subject . . . in whatever form you want to. If that's what you want to do, if that's the limit of the engagement you want to achieve—just sitting at the desk and dreaming moonyeyed about a vase—then what's fair is fair. It's just important to be honest about it—if you want to be scrambling up over the farthest ridge you can see, then if you're not doing that, you're shorting and cheating your subject.

Annie Dillard has said with regard to her book Pilgrim at Tinker Creek that of course she spent time wandering around in rural Virginia while she was working on it, but while actually writing, she would enclose herself in a study at the Hollins College library and shut the window blinds, locking herself into this artificial, view-