

☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC

143

Volume 143

Contemporary Literary Criticism

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



GALE GROUP

THOMSON LEARNING

*Detroit • New York • San Diego • San Francisco
Boston • New Haven, Conn. • Waterville, Maine
London • Munich*

STAFF

Lynn M. Spampinato, Janet Witalec, *Managing Editors, Literature Product*
Kathy D. Darrow, Ellen McGeagh, *Product Liaisons*
Jeffrey W. Hunter, *Senior Editor*
Mark W. Scott, *Publisher, Literature Product*

Justin Karr, Linda Pavlovski, *Editors*
Rebecca J. Blanchard, Arlene Johnson, *Associate Editors*
Tom Burns, *Assistant Editor*
Jenny Cromie, Mary Ruby, *Technical Training Specialists*
Deborah J. Morad, Joyce Nakamura, Kathleen Lopez Nolan, *Managing Editors*
Susan M. Trosky, *Director, Literature Content*

Maria L. Franklin, *Permissions Manager*
Margaret Chamberlain, *Permissions Specialist*
Debra Feitas, *Permissions IC Administrator*

Victoria B. Cariappa, *Research Manager*
Sarah Genik, *Project Coordinator*
Ron Morelli, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie A. Richardson, *Research Associates*
Nicodemus Ford, *Research Assistant*

Dorothy Maki, *Manufacturing Manager*
Stacy L. Melson, *Buyer*

Mary Beth Trimper, *Manager, Composition and Electronic Prepress*
Gary Leach, Carolyn Roney, *Composition Specialists*

Michael Logusz, *Graphic Artist*
Randy Bassett, *Imaging Supervisor*
Robert Duncan, Dan Newell, Luke Rademacher, *Imaging Specialists*
Pamela A. Reed, *Imaging Coordinator*
Kelly A. Quin, *Editor, Image and Multimedia Content*

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, the Gale Group neither guarantees the accuracy of the data contained herein nor assumes any responsibility for errors, omissions or discrepancies. 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.

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.

All rights to this publication will be vigorously defended.

Copyright © 2001 Gale Group, Inc.
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

Gale Group and Design is a trademark used herein under license.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 76-46132
ISBN 0-7876-4632-6
ISSN 0091-3421
Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

Named “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 biographical 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. Single-work 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.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- 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.
- 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 the Gale Group, 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 *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, and the *Contemporary Literary Criticism Yearbook*, which was discontinued in 1998.

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, 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 writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in the Literary Criticism Series may use the following general format to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books.

Alfred Cismaru, "Making the Best of It," *The New Republic* 207, no. 24 (December 7, 1992): 30, 32; excerpted and reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 85, ed. Christopher Giroux (Detroit: The Gale Group, 1995), 73-4.

Yvor Winters, *The Post-Symbolist Methods* (Allen Swallow, 1967), 211-51; excerpted and reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 85, ed. Christopher Giroux (Detroit: The Gale Group, 1995), 223-26.

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 Managing Editor:

Managing Editor, Literary Criticism Series
The Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
1-800-347-4253 (GALE)
Fax: 248-699-8054

Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the excerpted criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. We are also grateful to the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, the Library of Congress, the University of Detroit Mercy Library, Wayne State University Purdy/Kresge Library Complex, and the University of Michigan Libraries for making their resources available to us. 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 EXCERPTS IN *CLC*, VOLUME 143, WERE REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:

The American Book Review, v. 2, 1980; v. 19, January, 1998. Both reproduced by permission.—*American Film*, v. 14, October, 1988. Reproduced by permission.—*The Antioch Review*, v. 57, Spring, 1999. Copyright © 1999 by the Antioch Review Inc. Reproduced by permission of the Editors.—*The Bloomsbury Review*, v. 16, March-April, 1996 for a review of “The Lost Grizzlies: A Search for Survivors in the Wilderness of Colorado” by D. E. McIvor; v. 16, March-April, 1996 for a review of “In the Loyal Mountains” by Matt Sullivan; v. 18, March-April, 1998 for a review of “The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness” by Matt Sullivan. All reproduced by permission of the respective authors.—*Book World—The Washington Post*, v. , June 17, 1984; v. XIV, no. 25 for “When Tough Guys Touch Middle Age,” by Dennis Drabelle; April 6, 1997. Both reproduced by permission.—*Booklist*, v. 95, October 15, 1998. Copyright © 1998 by the American Library Association. Reproduced by permission.—*The Booksmith*, 1995 for an interview with Jim Carroll by Thomas Gladysz. Reproduced by permission of the author. —*Chicago Tribune Books*, June 11, 1995. Reproduced by permission.—*The Christian Science Monitor*, September 9, 1992; March 8, 1994. Copyright 1992, 1994 The Christian Science Publishing Society. Both reproduced by permission.—*Cineaste*, v. 24, 1999. Reproduced by permission.—*Commonweal*, v. 124, November 7, 1997; September 10, 1999. Copyright 1997, 1999 Commonweal Foundation. Both reproduced by permission.—*Contemporary Literature*, v. XXXVII, Winter, 1996; v. XXXVII, Summer, 1996. © 1996 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. Both reproduced by permission.—*Critique*, v. 25, Spring, 1984; v. 40, Spring, 1999. Both reproduced by permission.—*Dionysos: Literature and Addiction Quarterly*, v. 6, Winter, 1996, for “‘A Sickness That Takes Years to Perfect’: Jim Carroll’s Alchemical Vision,” by Cassie Carter. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*English Language Notes*, v. XXV, September, 1997. Copyright © 1997, Regents of the University of Colorado. Reproduced by permission.—*Essays in Arts and Sciences*, v. XXVI, October, 1997. Reproduced by permission.—*Film Comment*, v. 28, January, 1992 for “Lubricating the Muse,” by Donald Lyons. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*The Georgia Review*, v. 47, Spring, 1993 for a review of “The Ninemile Wolves” by William H. Rueckert. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*The Hudson Review*, v. 45, Autumn, 1992; v. 51, Spring, 1998; v. 52, Summer, 1999. Copyright © 1992, 1998, 1999 by The Hudson Review, Inc. All reproduced by permission.—*Journal of Canadian Studies*, v. 27, Winter, 1992-93. Reproduced by permission.—*The Journal of Narrative Technique*, v. 27, Spring, 1997. Reproduced by permission.—*Kirkus Reviews*, v. LV, May 15, 1987; v. LVII, May 1, 1989; v. LXIV, September 15, 1996; v. LXVI, April 15, 1998; v. LXVI, August 1, 1998. Copyright © 1987, 1989, 1996, 1998 The Kirkus Service, Inc. All rights reserved. All reproduced by permission of the publisher, *Kirkus Reviews* and Kirkus Associates, L.P.—*Library Journal*, v. 98, November 1, 1973 for a review of “Living at the Movies” by Seamus Cooney; v. 111, April 15, 1986 for a review of “The Book of Nods” by Daniel L. Guillory; v. 124, July, 1999 for a review of “Brown Dog of the Yaak: Essays on Art and Activism” by Mary Paumier Jones. Copyright © 1973, 1986, 1999 by Reed Elsevier, USA. All reproduced by permission of the publisher and the respective authors.—*Literature & Theology*, v. 9, September, 1995 for “Myth, Magic and Dread: Reading Culture Religiously” by Gregory Salyer. © Oxford University Press 1995. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*London Review of Books*, v. 17, October 5, 1995 for “Dark Fates” by Frank Kermode. Appears here by permission of the *London Review of Books* and the author.—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*, October 18, 1987; April 10, 1988; March 18, 1990; January 12, 1992; August 14, 1994; January 28, 1996; January 26, 1997; April 13, 1997; January 18, 1998; November 8, 1998. Copyright 1987, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998 *Los Angeles Times*. All reproduced by permission.—*The Midwest Quarterly*, v. 41, Winter, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by *The Midwest Quarterly*, Pittsburgh State University. Reproduced by permission.—*The Missouri Review*, v. 8, 1985. Copyright © *The Missouri Review*. Reproduced by permission.—*Modern Fiction Studies*, v. 45, Winter, 1999. Copyright © for the Purdue Research Foundation by the Johns Hopkins University Press. Reproduced by permission.—*Mosaic*, v. 27, June, 1994. © 1994 *Mosaic*. Reproduced by permission.—*National Review*, v. 49, November 24, 1997. Copyright 1997 National Review Inc. Reproduced by permission.—*The New Criterion*, v. 10, March, 1992 for “A Still Small Voice: The Novels of Penelope Fitzgerald” by Bruce

Bawer. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*New England Review/Bread Loaf Quarterly*, v. 12, 1989. Reproduced by permission.—*New Orleans Review*, v. 15, Spring, 1988. Reproduced by permission.—*The New Republic*, v. 221, August 2, 1999. © 1999 The New Republic, Inc. Reproduced by permission of *The New Republic*.—*New Statesman*, August 23, 1985. © 1985 Statesman & Nation Publishing Company Limited. Reproduced by permission.—*New Statesman & Society*, v. 5, April 24, 1992. © 1992 Statesman & Nation Pub. Co. Ltd. Reproduced by permission.—*New York*, v. 14, January 26, 1981. Copyright © 1981 PRIMEDIA Magazine Corporation. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of *New York Magazine*.—*The New York Review of Books*, v. 44, July 17, 1997. Copyright © 1997 Nyrev, Inc. Reproduced with permission from *The New York Review of Books*.—*The New York Times*, July 9, 1987; March 9, 1988. Copyright © 1987, 1988 by The New York Times Company. Both reproduced by permission.—*The New York Times Book Review*, May 22, 1994; January 3, 1999. Copyright © 1994 by The New York Times Company. Both reproduced by permission.—*Northwest Review*, v. 33, 1995. Reproduced by permission.—*The Observer*, September 17, 1995. Reproduced by permission of The Observer Limited, London.—*The Paris Review*, v. 35, Fall, 1993. © 1993 The Paris Review, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—*PMLA*, v. 106, May, 1991. Copyright © 1991 by the Modern Language Association. Reproduced by permission.—*Poetry*, v. 125, December, 1974 for “Traveling & Living” by Gerard Malanga. © 1974 by the Modern Poetry Association. Reproduced by permission of the Editor of *Poetry* and the author.—*Post Script*, v. 15, Winter-Spring, 1996. Reproduced by permission.—*Prairie Schooner*, v. 64, Summer, 1990. © 1990 by University of Nebraska Press. Reproduced from *Prairie Schooner* by permission of the University of Nebraska Press.—*Publishers Weekly*, v. 229, April 4, 1986; v. 237, August 3, 1990; v. 245, September 28, 1998; v. 246, May 17, 1999. Copyright 1986, 1990, 1998, 1999 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.—*Raritan*, v. 17, Spring, 1998. Copyright Rutgers University 1998. Reproduced by permission.—*Real Detroit Weekly*, January 13-19, 2000. Reproduced by permission.—*Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, v. 49, 1995. Reproduced by permission.—*The San Francisco Chronicle*, July 12, 1987. Copyright 1987 *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Reproduced by permission.—*Screen*, v. 40, Summer, 1999. Reproduced by permission.—*The Sewanee Review*, v. 99, April, 1991. Copyright © 1991 by The University of the South. Reproduced with permission of the editor.—*Sierra*, v. 76, September-October, 1991. Reproduced by permission.—*Sight and Sound*, v. 1, March, 1992; v. 9, April, 1999; v. 9, May, 1999; v. 9, July, 1999. All reproduced by permission.—*Southern Literary Journal*, v. 25, Fall, 1992. Copyright 1992 by the Department of English, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Reproduced by permission.—*The Southern Quarterly*, v. 22, Fall, 1983; v. 31, Spring, 1993; v. 35, Summer, 1997. Copyright © 1983, 1993, 1997 by the University of Southern Mississippi. All reproduced by permission.—*The Spectator*, London, v. 275, September 23, 1995; v. 280, April 11, 1998. © 1995, 1998 by *The Spectator*. Both reproduced by permission of *The Spectator*.—*Stanford Humanities Review*, v. 3, Winter, 1993. Reproduced by permission.—*Studies in Short Fiction*, v. 33, Winter, 1996. Copyright 1996 by Newberry College. Reproduced by permission.—*Time*, v. 150, December 8, 1997. Copyright 1997 Time Warner Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission from *Time*.—*Times Literary Supplement*, n. 4017, March 21, 1980; n. 4,111, January 15, 1982; n. 4761, July 1, 1994; n. 4782, November 25, 1994; n. 4824, September 15, 1995; n. 4829, October 20, 1995; n. 4937, November 14, 1997. © The Times Supplements Limited 1980, 1982, 1994, 1995, 1997. All reproduced from *The Times Literary Supplement* by permission.—*Western American Literature*, v. 27, Summer, 1992; v. 30, Spring, 1995; v. 31, Summer, 1996; v. 32, Summer, 1997; v. 33, Summer, 1998. Copyright 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998 by the Western American Literature Association. All reproduced by permission.—*The Women’s Review of Books*, v. XV, October, 1997 for “Love in the Time of Tuberculosis” by Dagmar Herzog. Copyright © 1997. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*World Literature Today*, v. 72, Spring, 1998; v. 73, Autumn, 1999. Copyright 1998, 1999 University of Oklahoma Press. Both reproduced by permission.—*The Yale Review*, v. 83, April, 1995. Copyright 1995 by Yale University. Reproduced by permission of the editors and Blackwell Publishers.

COPYRIGHTED EXCERPTS IN CLC, VOLUME 143, WERE REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:

Bauer, Margaret Donovan. From *The Fiction of Ellen Gilchrist*. University Press of Florida, 1999. Copyright 1999 by the Board of Regents of the State of Florida. Reproduced by permission.—McDonnell, Jane Taylor. From “Controlling the Past and the Future: Two-Headed Anna in Ellen Gilchrist’s ‘The Anna Papers,’” in *The Anna Book: Searching for Anna in Literary History*. Edited by Mickey Pearlman. Greenwood Press, 1992. Copyright © 1992 by Mickey Pearlman. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Phillips, Dana. From “Don DeLillo’s Postmodern Pastoral,” in *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and Environment*. Edited by Michael P. Branch and others. Copyright © 1998 by the University of Idaho Press. University of Idaho Press, 1998. Reproduced by permission.—Reeve, N. H. From “Oswald Our Contemporary: Don DeLillo’s ‘Libra,’” in *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction: International Writing in English since 1970*. Edited by Rod Mengham. Polity Press, 1999. Copyright © Polity Press 1999. Reproduced by permission.—Wicke, Jennifer. From “Fin de Siecle and the Technological Sublime,” in *Centuries’ Ends, Narrative Means*. Edited by Robert Newman. Stanford University Press, 1996. © 1996 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior

University. Reproduced by permission.—Woodland, J. Randal. From ““New People in the Old Museum of New Orleans’: Ellen Gilchrist, Sheila Bosworth, and Nancy Lemann,” in *Louisiana Women Writers: New Essays and a Comprehensive Bibliography*. Edited by Dorothy H. Brown and Barbara C. Ewell. Louisiana State University Press, 1992. Copyright © 1992 by Louisiana State University Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

PHOTOGRAPHS APPEARING IN *CLC*, VOLUME 143, WERE RECEIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

Bass, Rick, photograph by L. L. Griffin. Reproduced by permission of Rick Bass.—Carroll, Jim, photograph. © Roger Ressmeyer/Corbis. Reproduced by permission.—Cronenberg, David, photograph. The Kobal Collection. Reproduced by permission.—DeLillo, Don, photograph. Courtesy of Barbara Bennett. Reproduced by permission.—Fitzgerald, Penelope, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.—Gilchrist, Ellen, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Rick Bass 1958-	1
<i>American nonfiction writer, essayist, short story writer, and novelist</i>	
Jim Carroll 1950-	25
<i>American poet, autobiographer, songwriter, and musician</i>	
David Cronenberg 1943-	55
<i>Canadian filmmaker, screenwriter, and memoirist</i>	
Don DeLillo 1936-	160
<i>American novelist and playwright</i>	
Penelope Fitzgerald 1916-2000	233
<i>English novelist and biographer</i>	
Ellen Gilchrist 1935-	272
<i>American short story writer, novelist, and poet</i>	
Jim Harrison 1937-	334
<i>American novelist, poet, essayist, screenplay writer, illustrator, young adult writer, and critic</i>	
Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 363	
Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 439	
CLC Cumulative Nationality Index 447	
CLC-143 Title Index 463	

Rick Bass

1958-

American nonfiction writer, essayist, short story writer, and novelist.

The following entry presents an overview of Bass's career through 1999. For further information on his life and works, see *CLC*, Volume 79.

INTRODUCTION

Best known for his explorations of the relationship between man and nature, Bass is considered to be one of the foremost writers concerned with the treatment of the environment. While he frequently writes in essay and journal form (sometimes termed "creative nonfiction," in which he combines observations of the natural world with personal reflections), Bass is also recognized as an accomplished fiction writer. His fictional characters are noted for their realistic portrayals and for their placement in peculiar situations, in which they often exhibit a deep connection to their environments. Bass's tenacious preservationist ideals and his introspective writing style have garnered much attention, and he is widely regarded as an innovative contributor to contemporary American literature.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Bass was born in Fort Worth, Texas in 1958. As a child, he frequently listened to stories told by his grandfather and older relatives during family hunting expeditions—experiences which later influenced his use of an informal, colloquial prose style in his fiction. In 1976, Bass began his studies at Utah State University, majoring in wildlife sciences and later specializing in geology. After graduating, he moved to Mississippi and found employment as a petroleum geologist. During this time, Bass began to write essays and fiction about hunting and camping. In 1987, he left the petroleum industry and moved to Yaak, Montana, a remote community where he began writing full-time while serving as the caretaker of a ranch.

MAJOR WORKS

Throughout his work in multiple genres, Bass's writing explores the theme of human connection to various aspects of the environment. In his first book, *The Deer Pasture* (1985), Bass recalls the hunting expeditions of his youth, presenting detailed reminiscences of people and activities associated with hunting rituals. *Wild to the Heart* (1987), Bass's second collection of essays, recounts various camp-



ing, fishing, and canoeing voyages. In his first work of fiction, *The Watch* (1988), Bass continued to explore man's relationship to the earth. *The Watch* earned Bass a PEN/Nelson Algren Award Special Citation. The short stories within this work exhibit a type of "magical realism" in which Bass's characters find themselves in the midst of bizarre, but not overly surreal, circumstances. In "Chocteau," for example, a legendary figure in a small town is remembered for an incident in which he mixes galena (a blue ore) into a stolen cement mixer and spreads it throughout the streets of the town, causing chunks of blue rock to be visible when headlights illuminate them. "The Watch" also demonstrates Bass's affinity for placing characters in extraordinary situations, as the story focuses on a man who is camping in a swamp to escape his son and the ghost town where the two have been living alone. The man encounters a cast of characters who are seemingly insane, including a group of nude runaway laundresses. *Oil Notes* (1989), written in journal form, chronicles Bass's experiences as a petroleum geologist prospecting for oil in Mississippi. While Bass relates the

experiences of his underground exploration and his geological knowledge, the majority of the work details his contemplation of the natural world, his love for his girlfriend (and later wife) Elizabeth Hughes (who provides illustrations for the text), and various comical daily incidents. *Winter: Notes from Montana* (1991) is written in similar journal style. In this work, Bass recounts his adventures and struggles in the harsh winter of Montana's Yaak Valley. Bass enters the realm of ecological activism in *The Ninemile Wolves* (1992). In this essay, he examines the controversy surrounding a reappearing pack of wolves in the Ninemile Valley of Montana. Environmentalists fight for the preservation of the almost extinct species, while farmers and ranchers view the wolves as a threat to their livestock and wild game. A similar examination of human society and the destruction of American wildlife occurs in *The Lost Grizzlies: A Search for Survivors in the Wilderness of Colorado* (1995). This essay chronicles Bass's search for remnants of a dwindling and almost nonexistent population of the North American grizzly bear in the San Juan mountains of Colorado. Interspersed within the accounts of the search are humorous characterizations of Bass's companions, Doug Peacock and Marty Ring. *Platte River* (1994) is comprised of three short stories, highlighting characters who are defined by nature. In "Platte River," the protagonist visits an old friend to mourn the end of a romantic relationship and finds solace in nature. In "Mahatma Joe," the main character is a preacher who wishes to use his garden to civilize heathens. "Field Events" centers on a man with superhuman strength who is adopted by two brothers hoping to train him in the sport of discus throwing. The collection is unified by the theme of man's coexistence with the forces of nature. In *the Loyal Mountains* (1995) also addresses man's relationship to the land. This collection of ten short stories explores themes such as wilderness versus urbanization and the power of place. In "The History of Rodney," Bass focuses on a town that experiences a dramatic decrease in population due to a natural disaster. With the ensuing near-abandonment of civilization, the wild landscape begins to regain its dominance in the mostly vacant town. *The Book of Yaak* (1996) is an essay in which Bass lobbies for the preservation of the wilderness in the Yaak Valley, calling his readers to action. In this work, Bass expresses his passion for working to conserve the disappearing American wilderness. He also contemplates the role of art in environmental activism. Bass further examines the relationship of man and woman to nature in *The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness* (1997), a collection of three short stories. In the title story, protagonist Anne contemplates her ties to her childhood Texas home and the natural world that surrounds it. "The Myths of Bears" presents the story of a woman's escape from her neurologically disturbed husband into the winter wilderness. He soon follows, stalking her as if he were a savage beast. In "Where the Sea Used to Be," Wallis, a gifted oil prospector, manifests a spiritual connection to the land around him. Bass later expanded this short story into his first and, to date, only

novel *Where the Sea Used to Be* (1998). The book centers on Wallis, a young geologist employed by a petroleum company, and his relationships with his employer and the land.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Bass's evocative fiction and nonfiction are consistently praised for their lucidity of expression and depth of emotional intensity. His early nonfiction writing (*The Deer Pasture* and *Wild to the Heart*) was received favorably, and are noted by many as whimsical yet deeply emotional. Bass ventured into the realm of fiction with *The Watch*, which did not meet with the widespread praise that his nonfiction work encountered. Some critics condemned his short stories as overly simplistic and lacking in depth of thought and emotion. In addition, the individual stories within *The Watch* have been faulted for lacking cohesiveness. Several critics however, acknowledged *The Watch* as the work of a talented, developing young writer, despite its flaws. *Oil Notes* was negatively viewed by critics who felt Bass to be excessively preoccupied with banal details which gives his work a sense of superficiality. Others considered *Oil Notes* to be interesting and saw Bass's personal reflections as enhancements to the journalistic style. Bass's later essays and collections, *The Ninemile Wolves*, *The Lost Grizzlies*, *The Book of Yaak*, and *Brown Dog of the Yaak*, were met favorably by most literary critics. The essays were viewed as successful commentaries on the negative effects of human society on the natural world. Bass has been praised for his passion for the environment and, as in *The Lost Grizzlies*, for tempering sorrow with optimism for regeneration in the future. Bass was also applauded for his consideration of the issue of art versus ecological activism. Commenting on Bass's later works of fiction, critics often focus on character development in relation to individual connections with nature, as in *Platte River*. Reviewers favorably discussed Bass's treatment of nature's enduring spirit in spite of man's destruction of its beauty. In *the Loyal Mountains* is especially noted for its placement of ordinary characters in extraordinary circumstances, and for its commentary on the inseparability of man from nature. Man's connection to nature is also featured in *The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness*, and critics lauded the "magical realism" evident in the work. Some readers labeled individual stories within this collection as unrealistic and predictable, but most found charm in the surreal elements and the descriptions of nature which have become characteristic of much of Bass's fiction. *Where the Sea Used to Be*, Bass's only novel, was praised for its vivid imagery and intense character dynamics.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

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

The Watch (short stories) 1988
Oil Notes (nonfiction) 1989
Winter: Notes from Montana (nonfiction) 1991
The Ninemile Wolves (essay) 1992
Platte River (short stories) 1994
In the Loyal Mountains (short stories) 1995
The Lost Grizzlies: A Search for Survivors in the Wilderness of Colorado (essay) 1995
The Book of Yaak (essay) 1996
The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness (short stories) 1997
Where the Sea Used to Be (novel) 1998
Brown Dog of the Yaak: Essays on Art and Activism (essays) 1999

CRITICISM

Christopher Merrill (review date 1989)

SOURCE: "Reclaiming the Frontier: New Writings from the West," in *New England Review/Bread Loaf Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1989, pp. 213-15.

[In the excerpt that follows, Merrill offers a positive assessment of *The Watch*, focusing on Bass's exploration of the boundaries of possibility.]

Rick Bass may be a newcomer to Kittredge's part of the world; nevertheless, he reveals in his first collection of stories, *The Watch*, a genuine affinity for life in the West. Born and raised in Texas, he has lived in Utah, Arkansas, and Mississippi, and now caretakes a ranch in northwestern Montana; his stories are set in a similar variety of places, roughly half in the South, half in the West. He is by turns a petroleum geologist and environmental activist, which must give him a broad view of one of the thornier issues facing Westerners—the development of natural resources versus the preservation of wilderness areas. In like manner, his fiction is informed by the sympathy he generates for a wide range of characters. Rooted in the storytelling tradition of the South, he is equally at home spinning tales about the West; his Mississippi stories are as concerned with what Kittredge calls "a necessary wildness" as almost anything found in Montana. That his work has been included in both *New Stories from the South* and *The Best of the West* will surprise no one who reads *The Watch*: his "emotional ownership" of various landscapes is destined to enrich our literary life.

Like Kittredge, Bass probes the limits of possibility, discovering "nothing will get you into trouble so deep or as sad as faith." His characters are at once damned and redeemed by their faith—in loyalty, in love, in a simpler way of life, in the belief that at certain times trouble "was so far away that it seemed it would never return." But trouble is often closer than we think. For the narrator of "*Mississippi*," it takes the form of daily reminders that he was responsible for the failure of his relationship with

Leanne, "the fat girl who asked (him) to marry her." When he said no, she moved to California, leaving him with thousands of bottles of original-brand Coca-Cola, "because she didn't like the new formula." Like her brother, Hector, who believes their farm is sitting on top of an oil well but who will never get around to drilling for it, the narrator prefers to live in a world of possibility: if Hector strikes it rich, Leanne will use her share of the money to lose weight and he'll get an education. . . . But since he couldn't make a commitment, all he has now are the Coke bottles, three or four of which he smashes "against the rocks in the back pasture" after a bad day of work, and the vain hope that Leanne will return. "If she comes back and asks me again," he says at the end of the story, "this time I will marry her."

Oil plays a leading role in the trilogy of stories set in Houston—"Mexico," "*Juggernaut*," and "*Redfish*." The nameless narrator and his best friend, Kirby, grew up when "there weren't any wars, and there wasn't any racism, not in [their] lives, and [they] weren't hungry," realize in their senior year of high school that theirs is a privileged moment in our history. Houston is oil-rich, so rich in fact that it can support not one but two hockey teams; and the boys spend their nights watching aging athletes from the Juggernauts, the seedier of the two teams, fight it out on a rink at the edge of town. "*Juggernaut*" closes with a paean to that time:

This was back in those first days when Houston was clean and just growing, not yet beginning to die or get old. Houston was young, then, too. You cannot imagine how smooth life was for you, if you were in high school, that one spring, when oil was \$42 a barrel, and everyone's father was employed by the petroleum industry, and a hero for finding oil when the Arabs wouldn't sell us any. Anything was possible.

But Houston, like so many Western cities, has a boom-and-bust economy. Bass is particularly adept at charting the social effects of such an economy on the skids. In "*Mexico*" and "*Redfish*" we find the narrator and Kirby trying to make sense of their lives *after* high school. Something has gone wrong. The oil boom is over, the hockey teams are gone, and Houston is growing old:

Hell will come here first, when it opens. Everyone here's already dead. The heat killed them or something. People don't even fall in love anymore: it's just the pelvic thrust, and occasionally children as the result. There's no love, and that's the surest sign of death.

To combat their sense of doom, they keep a large bass in Kirby's swimming pool (along with "stumps, gravel, old trees," and a broken-down Volkswagen!), drink too many beers and an exotic concoction of rum, Diet Coke, and lime juice called a Cuba Libre, or drive to the Gulf to fish—in a freak snowstorm. And they hope something will change: "Maybe there will be a bad hatch of mosquitoes. A thunderstorm. Perhaps the Astros lose. We go to Mexico. The flights cost seventy-nine dollars, one way."

Odds are, though, nothing will change. The recognition that we live in a world of dwindling possibilities is what unifies this collection. Galena Tom Ontz may have "two

girlfriends and a key to Canada," but he also has a bad heart. And while the narrator of "**Chateau**" believes Ontz—"the wild man" of Montana's Yaak Valley—still has choices, still has freedom, it soon becomes clear that time is running out for him, as it is for so many characters in these stories. Rick Bass's flair for dramatizing an individual's confrontation with his own mortality makes *The Watch* a wise and wonderful book.

Kirkus Reviews (review date 1 May 1989)

SOURCE: A review of *Oil Notes* in *Kirkus Reviews*, Vol. 57, No. 9, May 1, 1989, p. 667.

[In the following favorable review of *Oil Notes*, Bass is commended for his vivid attention to detail, his honest expression, and his dual vision of life.]

Oil Notes is the record of a year in the young life of Bass, author of *The Watch* (1989), a highly praised short-story collection, and a geologist by trade. His purpose in these absorbing reflections is to establish his credentials as an oilman, describe his passion for digging and discovering oil, and pursue the various analogies discovered in a geologist's view of life.

Bass is a superb naturalist, and his account of searching for oil and bringing it from the unknown shadows to the earth's air and surface is done with such luminous prose that we almost see it occurring. Just as clear is the metaphoric connection between his vocation and his avocation as a writer—still searching for style and substance: "I want to stamp on the ground hard enough to make that oil come out. I want to skip legalities, permits, red tape, and other obstacles." From this dual vision of life, Bass spins out the various subjects, images, and people that are his vital resources: Elizabeth, his girlfriend, whom he courts by fixing a sandwich for her in the desert; the ecstasy of being snowbound; honeysuckle smell, the earth's strength, and the vulnerability of humans. Gradually, his two preoccupations merge, as he discovers that similar scruples govern both: "You can't find oil if you're not honest." Searching for oil or for language demands equal integrity, equal intensity. Consequently, the journey that this record finally describes is one of self-expression, where the 28-year-old author tests his view of things and discovers that his various appetites form one great rejoicing for life.

There are merged reflections here of the Hemingway of the big, two-hearted river stories, as well as the self-delight of Whitman. But one senses that Bass is also striking original chords of his own, soon to be heard past the oil reservoirs of Missouri and Alabama.

Charles Solomon (review date 18 March 1990)

SOURCE: A review of *Wild to the Heart*, in *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, March 18, 1990, p. 10.

[In the following review, Solomon presents a positive appraisal of *Wild to the Heart*.]

Unlike his short stories, which flounder through their oppressively Southern settings, Rick Bass' essays in *Wild to the Heart* are crisp, neatly structured and highly entertaining. His first-person accounts of camping, fishing and canoeing capture the lure of the wilderness and the camaraderie of the people who love it. Bass' spare prose has a studied artlessness reminiscent of Japanese brush painting. The description of the summer afternoon in "**Fish Fry**," when the most important decision the author faces is whether to take off his tennis shoes and socks, captivates the reader with its casual intimacy—while concealing the effort needed to achieve that easy informality.

Bass insists that he prefers the rugged Utah mountains he explored as a youth to the flat, wet Mississippi landscape of his current home, but his love for all of nature is so infectious that people who regard staying in a hotel as "roughing it" may find themselves daydreaming about tents in pine forests after they finish this delightful book.

Lee Lemon (review date Summer 1990)

SOURCE: "Bookmarks," in *Prairie Schooner*, Vol. 64, No. 2, Summer, 1990, pp. 131–32.

[In the following excerpt, Lemon praises *The Watch*, as the work of a talented yet still developing young writer with a strong voice.]

The Watch, the first collection of stories by Rick Bass, is also primarily about the land and the men who love it. It does everything a first collection by a promising young writer should do—establishes a new voice, stakes out an area of human experience as the author's own, implies a coherent set of values, and both satisfies and leaves room for development. The voice is finely modulated, totally unsentimental but concerned; the area of human experience explored is our struggle to retain the vitality of our youth—either by reliving it or by retelling it—; the values include a love of nature more persuasive because unspoken and an admiration for whatever is there in us that keeps us vital.

Yet the voice, the experiences, the values, even the settings are often reminiscent of those in *The Deer Pasture*, Bass's lyrically autobiographical account of his experiences deer hunting. The next step for Bass, perhaps the most difficult step for such a talented writer, is to preserve what is most distinctive and valuable in his work while widening it.

David Miller (review date April 1991)

SOURCE: "Slices of Wildlife," in *Sewanee Review*, Vol. 99, No. 2, April, 1991, pp. 323–24.

[In the excerpt that follows, Miller positively assesses *The Deer Pasture* as a lighthearted yet introspective narrative.]

Fresh out of college and immured in an office in Jackson, Mississippi, Bass looks back fondly on annual family deer-hunting forays. The stories in *The Deer Pasture* are raucous and salty—truly Texan, but reminiscent of that lovable desert rat and anarchist, Edward Abbey (who was conscripted for back-jacket commentary). Hunting, at least in this version, is decidedly social, a male-bonding ritual rather than an occasion for solitary reverie. Actually that's not entirely fair: there's a measure of male-female bonding in Bass's book, too. We meet grandmothers, mothers, aunts, and girl friends; in fact the book is ably illustrated with casual, evocative sketches by a woman whom Bass dates, Elizabeth Hughes. Bass's stories have the feel of the tall tale—humorous, absurd, extreme. Like Texas. Like Bass's compatriots: "Edsels in a world of Fords and Chevrolets." Take cousin Randy, for example, who once convinced Bass to run through the woods on the first day of hunting season waving a white handkerchief to simulate a deer's tail, screaming "Hullabaloo, caneck caneck." Consider the armadillo, a near-blind, bumbling, instinctive comedian and a major character in this book: "You will hear him before you see him . . . snuffling through the grass and leaves making a noise like some rain-dance shuffle step . . . rustle, rustle, pause-pause." Imagine the heavy-shelled creature accidentally going through the washer in a laundromat—and leaping out of the top. Of course the purpose of visiting the deer pasture is not to laugh, but to hunt. To kill deer. Bass faces this head on, neither aggressively nor defensively. He is so eloquent on the joys of finding the hunter within that I was almost convinced. One of the happy aspects of *The Deer Pasture* is that it portrays a healthy landscape, replete with native animals and vegetation, inhabited by hunters and ranchers who, apparently, care for each other and their surroundings. It is a landscape that inspires hope as well as memory; for those who love it, Bass writes, it is an anchor.

Though Bass never mentions it in *The Deer Pasture*, petroleum geology is what occupies him in that office in Jackson, Mississippi. *Oil Notes* is a journal, based on entries in notebooks Bass carries with him as he works. Written in the same cocky, energetic, tumbleweed prose of *The Deer Pasture*, these notes hum with youthful exuberance, skipping about with the enthusiastic eclecticism of an ambitious imagination. The notes convey a good deal of information about the underground wilderness probed by geologists, and they also introduce us to other Bass addictions—such as dogs, horses, farms, tractors, the Old Coke (he purchased more than a thousand when production ceased), and the illustrator Elizabeth Hughes. Bass disciplines his disparate enthusiasms with a passion for correspondences. Borrowing a phrase from Kafka, he explains that his goal as a writer is "to free the frozen sea within." In explaining geology, he writes of a different sea within: 250-million-year-old traces of an ocean under Alabama and Mississippi. Trapped under impermeable shale in the porous sands those seas left behind is oil. He longs to free it from the weight of the earth. His lover's passion is for Elizabeth, who is shielded by an impermeable desire to avoid commitment. Sometimes his passions

seem mutually reinforcing. Sometimes not. "Anything that's dear to me now will someday fall away from me because of writing." Unlike geology, writing (at least in that frame of mind) seems dishonest, a lie shielding writer from reader. Maybe. This book is a touch self-conscious, bordering on flippant in its humor; but the style *is*, revealingly and engagingly, Rick Bass.

Thomas J. Lyon (review date September 1991)

SOURCE: A review of *Winter: Notes from Montana*, in *Sierra*, Vol. 76, No. 5, September, 1991, p. 120.

[Lyon offers a favorable appraisal of *Winter: Notes from Montana*, in the review below.]

Winter: Notes from Montana offers good evidence that the Yaak country in northwestern Montana has, in John Muir's phrase, "grown into" Rick Bass. A Texan who went to college in Utah, Bass then took a job in Mississippi, only to find that the summons of the mountains had become insistent. When the settling urge came to him, his compass pointed wild and north. He and his friend (now wife) Elizabeth determined, after much searching, that the Yaak River Valley was right. *Winter* tells the story of slowing down, learning the ropes, committing.

At first came almost a frenzy of preparation: *Winter* on the Yaak is serious, and the couple had arrived late (in September). By February much wood had been chain-sawed and split, and certain lessons about backup parts for the generator, battery charger for the truck, and water-pipe technique had been learned. But the real beauty of this book is in how Bass, who at first saw the landscape as an obstacle to be overcome, grew to a more native acceptance and accommodation, and simultaneously experienced the opening up of a great joy. On a February night, the couple returned from Libby, a 45-mile trip, an expedition of some scale on a snowy evening. "Wiser souls would've stayed in town," but the lure of home was strong, so they put on chains and forged ahead, "the cold snowy night pressing in like the greatest friend. . . . We feel like kids: it's night and the world is ours."

There is an irrepressible energy in this book. There are also some huddling and cold hands, some doubt, and some potentially serious mistake-making (Bass seems to be a truth-teller of a writer), but the main sense is of engagement. Bass writes with the zest of coming into a country and finding it wild enough inspire the best he can give it, the best he can live.

Carol S. Long (review date Summer 1992)

SOURCE: A review of *Winter: Notes from Montana*, in *Western American Literature*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Summer, 1992, pp. 153–54.

[In the following favorable review of *Winter: Notes from Montana*, Long examines Bass's work as a contemplation of human civilization juxtaposed with nature.]

"It's easier to learn certain things when you're watching them occur in slow motion." Thus Rick Bass assesses his winter learning in the Yaak valley of Montana which he describes unsystematically in these journal notes dealing with isolation and community, snow and fuel.

Fuel is not a new interest for Bass. His 1989 *Oil Notes* is in substantially the same journal form and deals with the search for underground reservoirs of oil and gas; it reflects his career as a petroleum geologist in the South. In *Winter*, most of the search is above ground and the fuel which fascinates is wood, especially the giant larch whose interior is the color of "pumpkin-meat." One of the threads binding these notes together concerns the learning of wood: the tools, clothes, and techniques necessary to the gathering of wood, the forms of its burning.

In the Yaak valley, wood is also a means of community, drawing all together in the need, the buying and selling, the cutting and splitting. And it is in the description of this community, of individual discovery within the human situation, that Bass excels. Though *Winter* is in some ways a piece of "nature writing" and has been compared to works by Muir, Abbey and Dillard, Bass is really up to something different. He is more interesting for his reflections on civilization and the record of human change than for his perceptions of nature.

This book is not without conventional beauties: descriptions of wind, larch, snow, and the occasional absorption into nature. But we are definitely occupied with human growth and pursuit. Nature here is tinted with the language of civilization: the moon is a "great aluminum coin"; the snow falls "tumbling like planes crashing."

These notes might be compared to Eliot's *Wasteland* or Malcolm Lowry's *October Ferry to Gabriola* for their sense of flight from a fallen world and their discovery of a temporary heavenly afterlife in nature. On the other side of the hill the town of Libby may "fester and boil"; in the Yaak valley the wood which warms us produces smoke which changes the air. Bass is the voice of the fallen world in retreat, aware that all is not well. "We're all dirty, but we're all sweet."

In this remote valley it is with a sense of exposure that we watch the snow melt, opening the road to the world. Rick Bass has created a worthwhile human record and has a message for a late age: "Love the winter. Don't betray it. Be loyal."

Brad Knickerbocker (review date 9 September 1992)

SOURCE: "Three Generations of Wolf Pack Life," in *Christian Science Monitor*, September 9, 1992, p. 13.

[In the review of *The Ninemile Wolves* that follows, Knickerbocker praises Bass's passion for nature and discusses his focus on the correct relationship between man and the natural world.]

The biological and political world of endangered species includes thousands of little bugs and plants most people never hear of or care about, except when they get in the way of building something mankind wants or interfere with the extraction of natural resources. What are called the "charismatic megafauna"—the bigger critters (usually mammals)—are either warm and fuzzy and cute or carry with them a wild and sometimes violent history both frightening and attractive. Such is the case with wolves, whose reputation for strength and cunning seems mostly concentrated in stories about boys and girls (and little pigs) who get eaten. Over the past century, most of the wolves in North America were wiped out—shot, poisoned, and mangled in traps by bounty hunters and ranchers. This carnage has placed them on the official Endangered Species Act list, which provides protection from harm and requires a government "recovery plan." Wolves seem to be making a slight comeback in some areas, and this summer has seen an increasing debate over whether they should be reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park as part of their recovery.

There is no doubt where Rick Bass, author of *The Ninemile Wolves*, stands. He is accurately described in the dust jacket as "defiant and opinionated" and his lengthy essay on the subject as "not so much a scientific study as one man's vigorous, emotional inquiry into the proper relationship between man and nature." Despite (or perhaps because of) this passion for his subject, Bass's well-written book is a valuable contribution to the search for that proper balance as what we call civilization steadily and inevitably encroaches on the habitat and living patterns of other species. This work could properly be shelved alongside the writings of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Edward Abbey.

As well as being an active environmentalist and writer (this is his sixth book), Bass is an oil geologist and hunter who lives in Montana near the Canadian border. This book traces the brief, three-generation history of the known members of a small wolf pack tracked by federal government wildlife specialists in that area from 1989 to early this year. Much of what we see is through the eyes of United States Fish & Wildlife Service biologist Mike Jimenez and the Thisted brothers, longtime ranchers who admiringly watched and photographed the wolf pups in their pasture. There is frustration and tragedy to the story as some of the pack are shot, starved, and in one instance hit by a car on the interstate highway. Bass and the scientists who track them try hard not to anthropomorphize wolves, which do on occasion attack cattle, sheep, and pet dogs as well as the deer and elk that are their natural prey (and that have become overabundant because wolves are so scarce.)

But it's difficult for Bass and even the biologists and others who follow wolves closely not to attribute to them soulful and even spiritual qualities when the animals operate with such great vitality and in such obvious family units. "All wolves are tied together. It's a brotherhood, a

sisterhood. . . . They—the wolves—remind us of ourselves on our better days, our best days,” Bass writes. “They teach us splendidly about the overriding force of nature, too—about the way we’ve managed to suppress and ignore it in ourselves, or judge it.” In a way, what the dominant human society did to wolves in pushing back the frontier and claiming territory for economic gain in the form of tens of millions of head of nonnative species (cattle) is the same thing it did to native Americans. Something intangible—again, some would say spiritual—was lost in the process. That’s Rick Bass’s message, and it’s a good one to remember.

William H. Rueckert (review date Spring 1993)

SOURCE: A review of *The Ninemile Wolves*, in *Georgia Review*, Vol. 47, No. 1, Spring, 1993, pp. 199–202.

[In the following positive review, Rueckert discusses Bass’s examination of the unbalanced relationship between human society and wild nature in *The Ninemile Wolves*.]

The highly charged moral and ontological language of the following passage is characteristic of Rick Bass’s feisty, often polemical account of the return of wolves to Ninemile Valley, in the remote northwestern corner of Montana (his own home territory), after a sixty-year absence:

I have come away from following the Ninemile wolves convinced that to diminish their lives would be wicked; that it would involve a diminishing of a significant force in the world, that it would slow the earth’s potential and cripple our own species’ ability to live with force; that without the Ninemile wolves, and other wolves in the Rockies there would be a brown-out, to extend the metaphor of electricity; that the power would dim, and the bright lights of potential—of strength in the world—would grow dimmer.

Wolves had been systematically exterminated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries during the settling and domesticating of the American West by whites—that is, by those determined to bring culture and civilization to the rest of the new world. This land, of course, had long been occupied by the Indians, who had a highly developed culture of their own before the whites from the East came to claim it. As Bass is fond of pointing out, the wolf “problem” was related to the Indian and buffalo problem, and all three were dealt with in the same way and for the same reason: each stood in the way of progress and civilization (the American Dream) as conceived by the whites. Superior technology (guns, for example) made it possible to more or less eliminate the wolves and buffalo, and to either eliminate or confine the Indians—who depended upon the buffalo and had no quarrel with the wolves. What was at issue was the continued domestication and transformation of the wilderness into a “humanized” and “civilized” environment.

Bass mentions the Indians and buffalo, but he wisely confines himself mostly to the detailed story of the Ninemile wolves and, in a general way, to what has happened

to wolves in Mexico and other parts of the North American West. It is good to keep in mind certain essential truths as one tries to think about this book—the story it tells and the argument it makes. At one time, wolves may have been largely in control of their own destiny in this country, just as other wild creatures and other natural phenomena were. However, the future of wolves is entirely under human control now. Whether they live or die as a species, and whether they are allowed to continue to exist in Ninemile Valley or are reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park, will be decided by us and our political systems—just as we will decide the fate of the remaining wild rivers, still-existing wilderness areas, other wild creatures, and nonhuman life forms in general. So, although Bass tells a very specific local story about a limited number of wolves in a remote area of northwestern Montana, he is also clearly addressing a much larger issue, which is the relationship between people and the rest of nature. More and more, this has become an adversarial, either/or relationship in which wild nature is always the loser. What Bass learned from his experience with the Ninemile wolves is that this relationship could, and should, be a both/and one.

The lesson begins in early 1989, when a black alpha female wolf suddenly appears in Marion, Montana. She is joined by a two-year-old gray male and an old gray male, both of whom are soon shot. After the female has three pups, she and two of them are captured, collared, and released by federal wildlife agents. The lone male pup is untrappable and is later shot; his two sisters, released in an area where there is not enough food, soon starve to death.

The black alpha female makes her way to the Ninemile Valley and is joined there by a gray alpha male and a gray wolf of unknown sex. The wolves settle in on the Thisted brothers’ farm, the alpha wolves mating and producing six pups. These nine wolves constitute the 1990 Ninemile pack and are the main subject of the book. Theirs is not a happy story, in spite of the efforts of the Thisted brothers and the Feds to protect and help them. By the end of the year, all of the wolves have either disappeared, been shot, or sent to a wolf haven.

However, over the next two years wolves appear again on the Thisted brothers’ farm. A gray female is followed by one gray and one black wolf (sex unknown) to form the 1991–92 Ninemile pack. The female has a litter of three pups who were still alive and well as of August 1992. Whether or not these wolves survive is entirely up to us—that is, to the state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, the ranchers and farmers, the hunters, and the other inhabitants of the area who may or may not shoot or poison wolves—for whatever reason, and in spite of the threat of a \$100,000 fine and a year in prison.

Interspersed throughout this narrative of the Ninemile wolves there is a lot of wolf lore, both facts and myths: stories of wolf lovers and wolf haters, of wolf killers and wolf protectors; myths relating the demonizing of wolves;