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Review of *A Thousand Deer: Four Generations of Hunting and the Hill Country* By Rick Bass.

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A Thousand Deer: Four Generations of Hunting and the Hill Country. By Rick Bass. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012. 190 pp. \$24.95.

Known typically as a writer from Texas and Montana, or simply as one of the greatest contemporary American environmental writers, Rick Bass can certainly be considered “a writer of the greater Great Plains,” the region stretching from the prairie near the Gulf of Mexico to the Rocky Mountain foothills of the inland Northwest. The twelve essays collected in *A Thousand Deer* span the twenty-year period from 1991 to 2011, with most of them having appeared in such publications as *Texas Monthly* or *Texas Parks and Wildlife* during the past decade. One piece, “The Silent Language,” is published in this book for the first time. Whether focusing on the author’s child-

hood in Houston, or on his life as a father and husband, writer and hunter, in northwestern Montana, these stories and meditations explore the resonance of place in our memory and imagination. Many of these essays describe what Bass and his family call the “Deer Pasture” (hearken- ing back to the title of the author’s first book, which came out in 1985), the name itself a jok- ing reference to the pastureless, rocky landscape of the Texas Hill Country, where the family has hunted deer and turkeys for several generations.

Lovers of Bass’s instinctive, emotive prose will relish this well-selected volume of familiar and unfamiliar literary essays. “On Willow Creek,” which first appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1993 and has since been reprinted in various anthologies, is here, but this paean to Bass’s mother and the Deer Pasture and the inextricability of landscape and story is offered in this collection within the context of such essays as “My Natural- ist Mother,” “Records,” and “The Deer Pasture,” all of which deepen the resonance of the author’s thinking about the intergenerational sharing of love of nature and love of story. “What, from childhood, informs us as adults?” asks Bass early in “A Texas Childhood.” “What images of nature—and what relationships—last?” The entire collection, in a sense, pursues these questions, suggesting that the answer is some combination of memories of physical experience and “the fabric of stories.” Indeed, the emotional and material tangibility of Bass’s prose—exhibited at its finest in these pages—both demonstrates and contemplates the relationship between language and physicality.

Perhaps the most resounding messages of this volume come through in the opening and clos- ing essays: the first essay about Bass’s mother’s role in guiding him and her other sons toward the incandescence of the “mind-in-nature,” and the final one, “Mary Katherine’s First Deer,” in which the boy of the opening essay has become a father and is guiding his own older daughter to understand, as a thirteen-year-old, her relation- ship to the world by going hunting. In nearly thirty books, Rick Bass has guided his own readers, as he guides Mary Katherine in the book-conclud- ing narrative, to celebrate the electricity of a good

story, much as the hunter feels the electricity of a meaningful day in the woods. *A Thousand Deer* captures this energy masterfully.

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