



# Toward a Theory of Brittle Moments: The Nature Essay, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Role of Danger

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this 20 minute presentation, I will discuss how creative nonfiction writer Rick Bass's identification of "the brittle moment" can be a helpful way to approach a psychoanalytic criticism of nature writing. Bass, who lives in the remote Yaak Valley of Montana, posits that "brittle moments" happen when you encounter an animal, but the animal is calling the shots, not you. "Brittle moments" have driven the narratives of some, but not all, notable contemporary nature essays. We can better understand the value of these essays (and their role in social action in terms of animal rights, climate change, and preservation) if we develop a method for applying psychoanalytical criticism to both the finished essays of others that we admire, and our own drafting process. This presentation, therefore, will frame certain nature writing essays within the psychoanalytic concepts of our fear of death, our fascination with death, our level of denial or sense of false safety, the liminal intersection with desire and danger, and ways in which a "brittle moment" encounter illustrate the Jungian anima/animus. Tracks: Theory, Craft, and Culture; Social Action.