The Snow Leopard: (Penguin Orange Collection)

Peter Matthiessen
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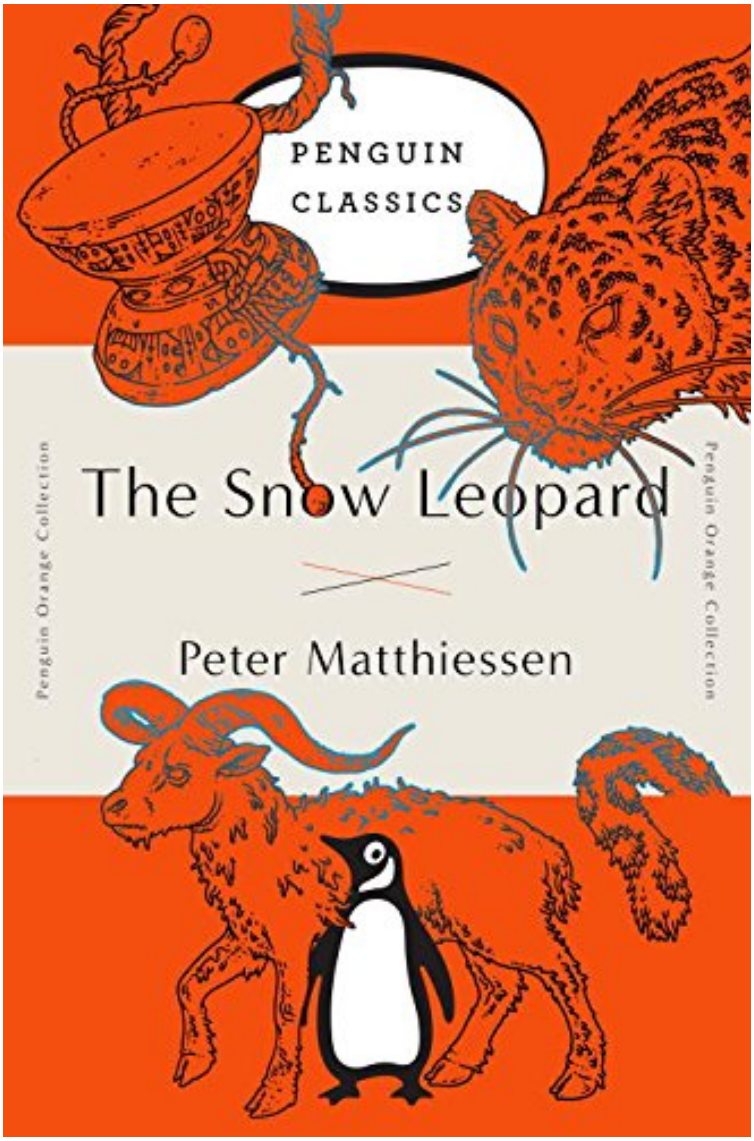

#219393 in Books PENGUIN 2016-10-18 2016-10-18Format: Deckle EdgeOriginal language:EnglishPDF # 1 7.80 x 1.00 x 5.20l, .81 #File Name: 014312952X352 pagesPENGUIN | File size: 58.Mb

Peter Matthiessen : The Snow Leopard: (Penguin Orange Collection) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Snow Leopard: (Penguin Orange Collection):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Nepal from a DistanceBy Marilyn S. MichelI looked for this book for years, and I finally bought my own copy. I finished it, and I will read it again. I was disturbed to find out he had left behind his 8-year old son after his wife died the year before (his other children were in boarding school). By the end of the book, it wasn't clear what he really got out of his pilgrimage. It was intense to read it while earthquakes

shook poor Nepal. He is a good writer.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Embodiment of the spirit of adventure.By Jon K.Stick with it. Some of the metaphysical aspects are a little fuzzy but it comes together well and will always be one of my favorite adventure stories.6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. One of the classics of travelogue literature: The Snow LeopardBy Magalini SabinaThoreaux: Where in all the world is the literature that gives expression to Nature?Here it is, in Peter Matthiessens's National Book Award Winning "The Snow Leopard". Peter Matthiessen is now a living legend, a prophet of ecological thought and a long time American Buddhist, but in 1973, when the book was conceived he still wasn't so famous. At the age of 46 he decided to trek through the Inner Dolpo region of Nepal with his friend and co-explorer G. Schaller (well known for his studies on the Mountain Gorillas) to study the bharal (Himalayan blue sheep) and to try to get a glimpse of the mysterious and rare snow leopard. From September to December the two men traveled with sherpas and porters from Pokhara, around the Annapurna, the Dhaulagiri, through the Jang-La Pass, to Phoksumdo Lake to the Crystal Mountain and the Shey Gompa Monastery and back, studying the wild life and rutting habits of bharal. While G. Schaller was basically interested in animals, Matthiessen in that period a Zen scholar, utilized the travel expedition to expose his thoughts, exercise his meditation abilities, recall his memories of past experiences (drugs, deaths, remorse and expectations) but most of all to paint with lyrical pen and great descriptive talent his surroundings and the people he met.This book is a little dated, and while reading it I was reminded of that great chapter of American writing that ties together Pirsing, Castaneda and many others, but none the less it is fascinating and gratifying because it resonates with a transcendent religious feeling of nature. In "The Snow Leopard" the ecological thought that weaves its way in all Matthiessen's works is still not full blown, but this makes the book even more incisive because the perception of his convictions lends a magic atmosphere to the travelogue. The reader has an intuition of the importance of respect of wildlife independently from modern day recriminations on its destruction.The philosophical/religious aspect is also very interesting, because we can see the fascination of an intellectual American with Buddhist thought. Peter Matthiessen is very generous of his knowledge an puts all his rich Buddhist experience in the text, explaining history, traditions and customs of the Tibetan culture.Matthiessen is also a very good interpreter of characters, as is evident from his novels. All the people he empathically describes jump out of the page and come to life. The canny and mysterious Tukten (maybe a guiding figure like Dante's Virgilio or a true Bodhisattva) and the nave and faithful Dawa become our friends as well, but also the many minor encounters like the Lama of Shey pass forever into literary history to be remembered.Two points of highlight are how the Author manages to convey the pleasure and the fatigue of the physical trip. I could actually feel his boots and the joy of having broken them in, the discomfort of the sun glaring on the snow and the beauty of the birds, flowers and landscapes he describes. The second is the excellence of the prose. Selected paragraphs are poems of beauty and the perfect use of the English language is in itself a reason to rejoice.This book is also a very personal and introspective diary. It talks about the man and his problems and probably this is the single most touching point of this great nature classic. At a distance of 30 years, people are taking guided trekking tours to Shey Gompa and its protected Natural Park, and much of the mystery has dissolved, however still few have seen the snow leopard, and discussion is still raging on the existence of the Yeti or Bigfoot.Read and reread this nature classic to capture all its merits. It is landmark of the American perception of Buddhism, ecological thought and one of the best travelogues around.

Part of the Penguin Orange Collection, a limited-run series of twelve influential and beloved American classics in a bold series design offering a modern take on the iconic Penguin paperbackWinner of the 2016 AIGA + Design Observer 50 Books | 50 Covers competition For the seventieth anniversary of Penguin Classics, the Penguin Orange Collection celebrates the heritage of Penguins iconic book design with twelve influential American literary classics representing the breadth and diversity of the Penguin Classics library. These collectible editions are dressed in the iconic orange and white tri-band cover design, first created in 1935, while french flaps, high-quality paper, and striking cover illustrations provide the cutting-edge design treatment that is the signature of Penguin Classics Deluxe Editions today.The Snow Leopard In 1973, Peter Matthiessen and field biologist George Schaller traveled high into the remote mountains of Nepal to study the Himalayan blue sheep and possibly glimpse the rare and beautiful snow leopard. Matthiessen, a student of Zen Buddhism, was also on a spiritual quest to find the Lama of Shey at the ancient shrine on Crystal Mountain. The result is a remarkable account of a journey both physical and spiritual, as the arduous climb yields to Matthiessen a deepening Buddhist understanding of reality, suffering, impermanence, and beauty.

About the AuthorPeter Matthiessen (19272014) is the only writer to win the National Book Award for fiction and nonfiction. A cofounder of The Paris , he was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and a recipient of its William Dean Howells Award, among many other honors. He was also a world-renowned naturalist, explorer, activist, and Buddhist teacher.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.PrologueIn late September of 1973, I set out with GS on a journey to the Crystal Mountain, walking west under Annapurna and north along the Kali Gandaki River, then west and north again, around the Dhaulagiri peaks and across the Kanjiroba, two hundred and fifty miles or more to the Land of Dolpo, on the Tibetan Plateau.GS is the zoologist George Schaller. I knew him first

in 1969, in the Serengeti Plain of East Africa, where he was working on his celebrated study of the lion.1* When I saw him next, in New York City in the spring of 1972, he had started a survey of wild sheep and goats and their near relatives the goat-antelopes. He wondered if I might like to join him the following year on an expedition to northwest Nepal, near the frontier of Tibet, to study the bharal, or Himalayan blue sheep; it was his feeling, which he meant to confirm, that this strange sheep of remote ranges was actually less sheep than goat, and perhaps quite close to the archetypal ancestor of both. We would go in the autumn to observe the animals in rut, since the eating and sleeping that occupied them throughout the remainder of the year gave almost no clue to evolution and comparative behavior. Near Shey Gompa, Crystal Monastery, where the Buddhist lama had forbidden people to molest them, the bharal were said to be numerous and easily observed. And where bharal were numerous, there was bound to appear that rarest and most beautiful of the great cats, the snow leopard. GS knew of only two Westernershe was onewho had laid eyes on the Himalayan snow leopard in the past twenty-five years; the hope of glimpsing this near-mythic beast in the snow mountains was reason enough for the entire journey.Twelve years before, on a visit to Nepal, I had seen those astonishing snow peaks to the north; to close that distance, to go step by step across the greatest range on earth to somewhere called the Crystal Mountain, was a true pilgrimage, a journey of the heart. Since the usurpation of Tibet by the Chinese, the Land of Dolpo, all but unknown to Westerners even today, was said to be the last enclave of pure Tibetan culture left on earth, and Tibetan culture was the last citadel of all that present-day humanity is longing for, either because it has been lost or not yet been realized or because it is in danger of disappearing from human sight: the stability of a tradition, which has its roots not only in a historical or cultural past, but within the innermost being of man. . . .2 The Lama of Shey, the most revered of all the rinpoches, the precious ones, in Dolpo, had remained in seclusion when a scholar of Tibetan religions3 reached the Crystal Monastery seventeen years ago, but surely our own luck would be better.On the way to Nepal, I stopped at Varanasi, the holy city on the Ganges, and visited the Buddhist shrines at Bodh Gaya and Sarnath. In those monsoon days of mid-September, the brown heat of India was awesome, and after a few days on the Ganges Plain, I was glad to fly north to Kathmandu, in the green foothills of the Himalayan wall. That day was clear, and among the temple spires and tiered pagodas, black kites and red veered on the wind. The dry air at 4000 feet was a great relief from the humidity of India, but in the north the peaks were hidden by thick clouds of the monsoon, and by evening it was raining.I found GS at the hotel. We had not met in a year or more, our last correspondence had been in midsummer, and he was relieved that I had turned up without mishap. For the next two hours we talked so intensely that I wondered later if there was anything left to speak about in the months ahead; we shall have no company but each other, and we do not know each other very well. (Of GS, I had written earlier that he is single-minded, not easy to know, and a stern pragmatist, unable to muster up much grace in the face of unscientific attitudes; he takes a hard-eyed look at almost everything. He was also described as a lean, intent young man,4 and I find him as lean and as intent as ever.)The rains prevailed throughout the last three days in Kathmandu. GS was desperate to get under way, not only because he loathes all cities but because winter comes early to the Himalaya, and these rains of the monsoon would bring heavy snow to the high passes between this place and our destination. (We later learned that the October rains set an all-time record.) Months before, he had applied for permission to enter Dolpo, but only now, on the final day, were permits granted. Last letters were written and sent off; there would be no mail where we were going. All excess gear and clothing were discarded, and travelers checks exchanged for small rupee notes by the dirty packet, since large bills have no currency among the hill peoples. With our Sherpa camp assistants, we packed tents and pots, and bargained for last-minute supplies in the Oriental rumpus of the Asan Bazaar, where in 1961 I had bought a small bronze Buddha, green with age. My wife and I were to become students of Zen Buddhism, and the green bronze Buddha from Kathmandu was the one I chose for a small altar in Deborahs room in the New York hospital where she died last year of cancer, in the winter.In the early morning of September 26, in a hard rain, with a driver, two Sherpas, and all expedition gear, we packed ourselves into the Land Rover that would carry us as far as Pokhara; two more Sherpas and five Tamang porters were to come next day by bus, in time for departure from Pokhara on the twenty-eighth. But all arrivals and departures were in doubt; it had rained without relent for thirty hours. In the calamitous weather, the journey was losing all reality, and the warm smile of a pretty tourist at the hotel desk unsettled me; where did I imagine I was going, where and why?From Kathmandu there is a road through Gorkha country to Pokhara, in the central foothills; farther west, no roads exist at all. The road winds through steep gorges of the Trisuli River, now in torrent; dirty whitecaps filled the rapids, and the brown flood was thickened every little while by thunderous rockslides down the walls of the ravine. Repeatedly the rocks fell on the road: the driver would wait for the slide to ease, then snake his way through the debris, while all heads peered at the boulders poised overhead. In raining mountains, a group of shrouded figures passed, bearing a corpse, and the sight aroused a dim, restless foreboding.After midday, the rain eased, and the Land Rover rode into Pokhara on a shaft of storm light. Next day there was humid sun and shifting southern skies, but to the north a deep tumult of swirling grays was all that could be seen of the Himalaya. At dusk, white egrets flapped across the sunken clouds, now black with rain; on earth, the dark had come. Then, four miles above these mud streets of the lowlands, at a point so high as to seem overhead, a luminous whiteness shonethe light of snows. Glaciers loomed and vanished in the grays, and the sky parted, and the snow cone of Machhapuchare glistened like a spire of a higher kingdom.In the night, the stars

convened, and the vast ghost of Machhapuchare radiated light, although there was no moon. In the shed where we lay down, behind a sort of inn, there were mosquitoes. My friend, dreaming, cried out in his sleep. Restless, I went out at daybreak and saw three peaks of Annapurna, soaring clear of low, soft clouds. This day we would depart for the northwest.WestwardJust as a white summer cloud, in harmony with heaven and earth freely floats in the blue sky from horizon to horizon following the breath of the atmospherein the same way the pilgrim abandons himself to the breath of the greater life that . . . leads him beyond the farthest horizons to an aim which is already present within him, though yet hidden from his sight.LAMA GOVINDAThe Way of the White CloudsAll other creatures look down toward the earth, but man was given a face so that he might turn his eyes toward the stars and his gaze upon the sky.OVIDMetamorphosesSEPTEMBER 28At sunrise the small expedition meets beneath a giant fig beyond Pokharatwo white sahibs, four Sherpas, fourteen porters. The Sherpas are of the famous mountain tribe of northeast Nepal, near Namche Bazaar, whose men accompany the ascents of the great peaks; they are Buddhist herders who have come down in recent centuries out of eastern Tibetsherpa is a Tibetan word for easternerand their language, culture, and appearance all reflect Tibetan origin. One of the porters is also a Sherpa, and two are refugee Tibetans; the rest are of mixed Aryan and Mongol stock. Mostly barefoot, in ragged shorts or the big-seated, jodhpur-legged pants of India, wearing all manner of old vests and shawls and headgear, the porters pick over the tall wicker baskets. In addition to their own food and blankets, they must carry a load of up to eighty pounds that is braced on their bent backs by a tump line around the forehead, and there is much hefting and denunciation of the loads, together with shrill bargaining, before any journey in these mountains can begin. Porters are mostly local men of uncertain occupation and unsteadfast habit, notorious for giving trouble. But it is also true that their toil is hard and wretchedly rewardedabout one dollar a day. As a rule, they accompany an expedition for no more than a week away from home, after which they are replaced by others, and the hefting and denunciation start anew. Today nearly two hours pass, and clouds have gathered, before all fourteen are mollified, and the tattered line sets off toward the west.We are glad to go. These edges of Pokhara might be tropical outskirts anywherevacant children, listless adults, bent dogs and thin chickens in a litter of sagging shacks and rubble, mud, weeds, stagnant ditches, bad sweet smells, vivid bright broken plastic bits, and dirty fruit peelings awaiting the carrion pig; for want of better fare, both pigs and dogs consume the human excrement that lies everywhere along the paths. In fair weather, all this flux is tolerable, but now at the dreg end of the rainy season, the mire of life seems leached into the sallow skins of these thin beings, who squat and soap themselves and wring their clothes each morning in the rain puddles.Brown eyes observe us as we pass. Confronted with the pain of Asia, one cannot look and cannot turn away. In India, human misery seems so pervasive that one takes in only stray details: a warped leg or a dead eye, a sick pariah dog eating withered grass, an ancient woman lifting her sari to move her shrunken bowels by the road. Yet in Varanasi there is hope of life that has been abandoned in such cities as Calcutta, which seems resigned to the dead and dying in its gutters. Shiva dances in the spicy foods, in the exhilarated bells of the swarming bicycles, the angry bus horns, the chatter of the temple monkeys, the vermilion tikka dot on the womens foreheads, even in the scent of charred human flesh that pervades the ghats. The people smilethat is the greatest miracle of all. In the heat and stench and shriek of Varanasi, where in fiery sunrise swallows fly like departing spirits over the vast silent river, one delights in the smile of a blind girl being led, of a Hindu gentleman in white turban gazing benignly at the bus driver who reviles him, of a flute-playing beggar boy, of a slow old woman pouring holy water from Ganga, the River, onto a stone elephant daubed red.Near the burning ghats, and the industry of death, a river palace has been painted with huge candy-striped tigers.No doubt Varanasi is the destination of this ancient Hindu at the outskirts of Pokhara, propped up on a basket borne on poles across the shoulders of four servantsoff, it appears, on his last pilgrimage to the Mother Ganges, to the dark temples that surround the ghats, to those hostels where the pilgrim waits his turn to join the company of white-shrouded cadavers by the river edge, waits again to be laid upon the stacks of fired wood: the attendants will push this yellow foot, that shriveled elbow, back into the fire, and rake his remains off the burning platform into the swift river. And still enough scraps will remain to sustain life in the long-headed cadaverous dogs that haunt the ashes, while sacred kinehuge white silent thingsdevour the straw thongs that had bound this worn-out body to its stretcher.The old man has been ravened from within. That blind and greedy stare of his, that caved-in look, and the mouth working, reveal who now inhabits him, who now stares out.I nod to Death in passing, aware of the sound of my own feet upon my path. The ancient is lost in a shadow world, and gives no sign.Gray river road, gray sky. From rock to torrent rock flits a pied wagtail.Wayfarers: a delicate woman bears a hamper of small silver fishes, and another bends low beneath a basket of rocks that puts my own light pack to shame; her rocks will be hammered to gravel by other women of Pokhara, in the labor of the myriad brown hands that will surface a new road south to India.Through a shaft of sun moves a band of Magar women, scarlet-shawled; they wear heavy brass ornaments in the left nostril. In the new sun, a red-combed rooster clambers quickly to the roof matting of a roadside hut, and fitfully a little girl starts singing. The light irradiates white peaks of Annapurna marching down the sky, in the great rampart that spreads east and west for eighteen hundred miles, the Himalayathe alaya (abode, or home) of hima (snow).Hibiscus, frangipani, bougainvillea: seen under snow peaks, these tropical blossoms become the flowers of heroic landscapes. Macaques scamper in green meadow, and a turquoise roller spins in a golden light. Drongos, rollers, barbets, and the white Egyptian vulture are the common birds, and all have close relatives in East

Africa, where GS and I first met; he wonders how this vulture would react if confronted with the egg of an ostrich, which was also a common Asian bird during the Pleistocene. In Africa, the Egyptian vulture is recognized as a tool-using species, due to its knack of cracking the huge ostrich eggs by slinging rocks at them with its beak.Until quite recently, these Nepal lowlands were broadleaf evergreen sal forest (Shorea robusta), the haunt of elephant and tiger and the great Indian rhinoceros. Forest-cutting and poaching cleared them out; except in last retreats such as the Rapti Valley, to the southeast, the saintly tread of elephants is gone. The last wild Indian cheetah was sighted in central India in 1952, the Asian lion is reduced to a single small population in the Gir Forest, northwest of Bombay, and the tiger becomes legendary almost everywhere. Especially in India and Pakistan, the hoofed animals are rapidly disappearing, due to destruction of habitat by subsistence agriculture, overcutting of the forests, overgrazing by the scraggy hordes of domestic animals, erosion, floodthe whole dismal cycle of events that accompanies overcrowding by human beings. In Asia more than all places on earth, it is crucial to establish wildlife sanctuaries at once, before the last animals are overwhelmed. As GS has written, Man is modifying the world so fast and so drastically that most animals cannot adapt to the new conditions. In the Himalaya as elsewhere there is a great dying, one infinitely sadder than the Pleistocene extinctions, for man now has the knowledge and the need to save these remnants of his past.1The track along the Yamdi River is a main trading route, passing through rice paddies and villages on its way west to the Kali Gandaki River, where it turns north to Mustang and Tibet. Green village compounds, set about with giant banyans and old stone pools and walls, are cropped to lawn by water buffalo and cattle; the fresh water and soft shade give them the harmony of parks. These village folk own even less than those of Pokhara, yet they are spared by their old economies from modern poverty: one understands why village life has been celebrated as the natural, happy domain of man by many thinkers, from Lao-tzu to Gandhi. In a warm sun children play, and women roll clothes on rocks at the village fountain and pound grain in stone mortars, and from all sides come reassuring dung smells and chicken clatter and wafts of fire smoke from the low hearths. In tidy yards, behind strong stiles and walls, the clay huts are of warm earthen red, with thatched roofs, hand-carved sills and shutters, and yellow-flowered pumpkin vines. Maize is stacked in narrow cribs, and rice is spread to dry on broad straw mats, and between the banana and papaya trees big calm spiders hang against the sky.A canal bridged here and there by ten-foot granite slabs runs through a hamlet, pouring slowly over shining pebbles. It is midday, the sun melts the air, and we sit on a stone wall in the cool shade. By the canal is the village tea house, a simple open-fronted hut with makeshift benches and a clay oven in the form of a rounded mound on the clay floor. The mound has a side opening for inserting twigs and two holes on the top for boiling water, which is poured through a strainer of cheap tea dust into a glass containing coarse sugar and buffalo milk. With this chiyawe take plain bread and a fresh cucumber, while children playing on the shining stones pretend to splash us, and a collared dove sways on a tall stalk of bamboo.One by one the porters come, turning around to lower their loads onto the wall. A porter of shy face and childlike smile, who looks too slight for his load, is playing comb music on a fig leaf. Too many hot, says another, smiling. This is the Sherpa porter, Tukten, a wiry small man with Mongol eyes and outsized ears and a disconcerting smileI wonder why this Tukten is a porter.I set off ahead, walking alone in the cool breeze of the valley. In the bright September light and mountain shadowsteep foothills are closing in as the valley narrows, and the snow peaks to the north are no longer seenthe path follows a dike between the reedy canal and the green terraces of rice that descend in steps to the margins of the river. Across the canal, more terraces ascend to the crests of the high hills, and a blue sky.At a rest wall, two figs of different species were planted long ago; one is a banyan, or nigrodha (Ficus indica), the other a pipal (F. religiosa), sacred to both the Hindus and the Buddhists. Wild flowers and painted stones are set among the buttressed roots, to bring the traveler good fortune, and stone terraces are built up around the trunks in such a way that the shade-seeking traveler may back up and set down his load while standing almost straight. These resting places are everywhere along the trading routes, some of them so ancient that the great trees have long since died, leaving two round holes in a stonework oval platform. Like the tea houses and the broad stepping-stones that are built into the hills, the rest walls impart a blessedness to this landscape, as if we had wandered into a lost country of the golden age.Awaiting the line of porters that winds through the paddies, I sit on the top level of the wall, my feet on the step on which the loads are set and my back against a tree. In dry sunshine and the limpid breeze down from the mountains, two black cows are threshing rice, flanks gleaming in the light of afternoon. First the paddy is drained and the rice sickled, then the yoked animals, tied by a long line to a stake in the middle of the rice, are driven round and round in a slowly decreasing circle while children fling the stalks beneath their hooves. Then the stalks are tossed into the air, and the grains beneath swept into baskets to be taken home and winnowed. The fire-colored dragonflies in the early autumn air, the bent backs in bright reds and yellows, the gleam on the black cattle and grain stubble, the fresh green of the paddies and the sparkling riverover everything lies an immortal light, like transparent silver.In the clean air and absence of all sound, of even the simplest machineryfor the track is often tortuous and steep, and fords too many streams, to permit bicyclesin the warmth and harmony and seeming plenty, come whispers of a paradisal age. Apparently the grove of sal trees called Lumbini, only thirty miles south of this same tree, in fertile lands north of the Rapti River, has changed little since the sixth century B.C. when Siddhartha Gautama was born there to a rich clan of the Sakya tribe in a kingdom of elephants and tigers. Gautama forsook a life of ease to become a holy mendicant, or wanderera common practice in northern India even

today. Later he was known as Sakyamuni (Sage of the Sakyas), and afterward, the Buddhathe Awakened One. Fig trees and the smoke of peasant fires, the greensward and gaunt cattle, white egrets and jungle crows are still seen on the Ganges Plain where Sakyamuni passed his life, from Lumbini south and east to Varanasi (an ancient city even when Gautama came there) and Rajgir and Gaya. Tradition says that he traveled as far north as Kathmandu (even then a prosperous city of the Newars) and preached on the hill of Swayambhunath, among the monkeys and the pines.In Sakyamunis time, the disciplines called yogas were already well evolved. Perhaps a thousand years before, the dark-skinned Dravidians of lowland India had been overcome by nomad Aryans from the Asian steppes who were bearing their creed of sky gods, wind, and light across Eurasia.2 Aryan concepts were contained in their Sanskrit Vedas, or knowledgeancient texts of unknown origin which include the Rig Veda and the Upanishads and were to become the base of the Hindu religion. To the wandering ascetic named Sakyamuni, such epic preachments on the nature of the Universe and Man were useless as a cure for human suffering. In what became known as the Four Noble Truths, Sakyamuni perceived that mans existence is inseparable from sorrow; that the cause of suffering is craving; that peace is attained by extinguishing craving; that this liberation may be brought about by following the Eight-fold Path: right attention to ones understanding, intentions, speech, and actions; right livelihood, effort, mindfulness; right concentration, by which is meant the unification of the self through sitting yoga.The Vedas already included the idea that mortal desiresince it implies lackhad no place in the highest state of being; that what was needed was that death-in-life and spiritual rebirth sought by all teachers, from the early shamans to the existentialists. Sakyamunis creed was less a rejection of Vedic philosophy than an effort to apply it, and his intense practice of meditation does not content itself with the serenity of yoga states (which in his view falls sort of ultimate truth) but goes beyond, until the transparent radiance of stilled mind opens out in prajna, or transcendent knowing, that higher consciousness or Mind which is inherent in all sentient beings, and which depends on the unsentimental embrace of all existence. A true experience of prajna corresponds to enlightenment or liberationnot change, but transformationa profound vision of his identity with universal life, past, present, and future, that keeps man from doing harm to others and sets him free from fear of birth-and-death.In the fifth century B.C., near the town of Gaya, south and east of Varanasi, Sakyamuni attained enlightenment in the deep experience that his own true nature, his Buddha-nature, was no different from the nature of the universe. For half a century thereafter, at such places as the Deer Park in Sarnath, and Nalanda, and the Vultures Peak near present-day Rajgir, he taught a doctrine based upon the impermanence of individual existence, the eternal continuity of becoming, as in the morning river that appears the same as the river of the night before, now passed away. (Though he preached to women and weakened the caste system by admitting low-born brethren to his order, Sakyamuni never involved himself in social justice, far less government; his way holds that self-realization is the greatest contribution one can make to ones fellow man.) At the age of eighty, he ended his days at Kusinagara (the modern Kusinara), forty miles east of Gorakhpur and just west of the Kali Gandaki River.This much is true; all else is part of the great Buddha legend, which is truth of a different order. In regard to his enlightenment, it is related that this wanderer was in his thirties when he gave up the rigors of the yogi and embraced the Middle Path between sensuality and mortification, accepting food in a golden bowl from the daughter of the village headman. Thereupon, he was renounced by his disciples. At dusk he sat himself beneath a pipal tree with his face toward the East, vowing that though his skin and nerves and bones should waste away and his life-blood dry, he would not leave this seat until he had attained Supreme Enlightenment. All that night, beset by demons, Sakyamuni sat in meditation. And in that golden daybreak, it is told, the Self-Awakened One truly perceived the Morning Star, as if seeing it for the first time in his life.In what is now known as Bodh Gayastill a pastoral land of cattle savanna, shimmering water, rice paddies, palms, and red-clay hamlets without paved roads or wiresa Buddhist temple stands beside an ancient pipal, descended from that bodhi tree, or Enlightenment Tree, beneath which this man sat. Here in a warm dawn, ten days ago, with three Tibetan monks in maroon robes, I watched the rising of the Morning Star and came away no wiser than before. But later I wondered if the Tibetans were aware that the bodhi tree was murmuring with gusts of birds, while another large pipal, so close by that it touched the holy tree with many branches, was without life. I make no claim for this event: I simply declare what I saw there at Bodh Gaya.Already the Yamdi Khola narrows; soon it will vanish among mountains. In a village on the northern slope, the huts are round or oval rather than rectangular, and Jang-bu, the head Sherpa, says that this is a village of the Gurung, a people who came down long ago out of Tibet. In this region of southern Nepal live various hill peoples of Mongol and Aryan mix, most of them Paharis, or hill Hindus. For centuries, the Hindus have come up along the river valleys from the great plain of the Ganges, while Tibetans crossed the mountain passes from the north: the Tibetan-speaking Buddhist tribes, which include the Sherpas, are called Bhotes, or southern Tibetans. (Bhot or Bod is Tibet; Bhutan, which lies at the southern edge of Tibet, means End of Bhot.) Of the tribes represented by the porters, the Gurungs and Tamangs tend toward Buddhism, while the Chetris and Magars are Hindus. Whether Hindu or Buddhist, most of these tribesand the Gurung especiallypay respect to the animist deities of the old religions that persist in remote corners of the Asian mountains.Some long-haired Tibetans, buttery flat faces red with ocher sheen, descend the river barefoot on the silver stones. (Ocher is a traditional protection against cold and insects, and before the civilizing influence of Buddhism, Tibet was known as the Land of the Red-faced Devils.) These people are bound for Pokhara from Dhorpatan, a week away. When crops are harvested,

the Tibetans, Mustang Bhotes, and other hill peoples follow the ridges and valleys south and east to Pokhara and Kathmandu, trading wool and salt for grain and paper, knives, tobacco, rice, and tea. One Tibetan boy has caught a rockfish in the shallows; he runs to show me, almond eyes agleam. The children all along the way are friendly and playful, even gay; though they beg a little, they are not serious about it, as are the grim Hindu children of the towns. More likely they will take your hand and walk along a little, or do a somersault, or tag and run away.Where the valley narrows to a canyon, there is a tea house and some huts, and here a pack train of shaggy Mongol ponies descends from the mountain in a melody of bells and splashes across the swift green water at the ford. From the tea house, a trail climbs steeply toward the southwest sky. In this land, the subsistence economies have always depended upon travel, and in its decadescenturies, perhapsas a trade route for the hill peoples, broad steps have been worn into the mountain path. Wild chestnut trees overhang the trail; we pull down branches to pick the spiny nuts.At sunset, the trail arrives at the hill village called Naudanda. Here I try out my new home, a one-man mountain tent, in poor condition. Phu-Tsering, our merry cook, in bright red cap, brings supper of lentils and rice, and afterward I sit outside on a wicker stool acquired at the tea house at the ford, and listen to cicadas and a jackal. This east-west ridge falls steeply on both sides to the Yandi Valley in the north, the Marsa in the south; from Naudanda, the Yamdi Khola is no more than a white ribbon rushing down between dark walls of conifers into its gorge. Far away eastward, far below, the Marsa River opens out into Lake Phewa, near Pokhara, which glints in the sunset of the foothills. There are no roads west of Pokhara, which is the last outpost of the modern world; in one days walk we are a century away.SEPTEMBER 29A luminous mountain morning. Mist and fire smoke, sun shafts and dark ravines: a peak of Annapurna poises on soft clouds. In fresh light, to the peeping of baby chickens, we take breakfast in the village tea house, and are under way well before seven.A child dragging bent useless legs is crawling up the hill outside the village. Nose to the stones, goat dung, and muddy trickles, she pulls herself along like a broken cricket. We falter, ashamed of our strong step, and noticing this, she gazes up, clear-eyed, without resentmentit seems much worse that she is pretty. In Bengal, GS says stiffly, beggars will break their childrens knees to achieve this pitiable effect for business purposes: this is his way of expressing his distress. But the child that lies here at our boots is not a beggar; she is merely a child, staring in curiosity at tall, white strangers. I long to give her somethinga new life?yet am afraid to tamper with such dignity. And so I smile as best I can, and say Namas-te! Good morning! How absurd! And her voice follows as we go away, a small clear smiling voiceNamas-te!a Sanskrit word for greeting and parting that means, I salute you.We are subdued by this reminder of mortality. I think of the corpse in Gorkha Country, borne on thin shoulders in the mountain rain, the black cloths blowing; I see the ancient dying man outside Pokhara; I hear again my own wifes final breath. Such sights caused Sakyamuni to forsake Lumbini and go in search of the secret of existence that would free men from the pain of this sensory world, known as samsara.Grieve not for me, but mourn for those who stay behind, bound by longings to which the fruit is sorrow . . . for what confidence have we in life when death is ever at hand? . . . Even were I to return to my kindred by reason of affection, yet we should be divided in the end by death. The meeting and parting of living things is as when clouds having come together drift apart again, or as when the leaves are parted from the trees. There is nothing we may call our own in a union that is but a dream. . . .3And yet, as his own death drew near, Sakyamuni turned again toward the north (Come, Ananda, let us go to Kusinagara). Like the rest of us, perhaps he longed for home.