“One Day I Shall Meditate In Falling Snow:” Meditation and Eastern Ways of Perceiving in Peter Matthiessen’s *The Snow Leopard* and George Schaller’s *Stones of Silence*

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Introduction to Thesis Argument

Mark Lawrence, scientific director of the Potsdam Institute of Advanced Sustainability Studies, ended a recent talk at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society with a call for a turn towards spirituality, and Buddhism in particular, as an effective area of research to aid science in the fight for a more sustainable Earth. Lawrence, in a short article from the Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture, paraphrases lead author Till Markus when he says:

> The concept of interrelatedness: according to Buddhist tradition, humans are inextricably linked to nature and each other in a relationship that is non-hierarchical. The full realisation of this interdependence can help us to overcome our egocentric wishes and become more aware, more compassionate, and less destructive to our environment (Lawrence, 2).

Lawrence is more explicit about the implications of Buddhist thought in relation to the environment than in any passage of Peter Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard*, but it does not subtract from the content of Matthiessen's message, which is much the same, and is the focus of this thesis. Lawrence goes on to say that climate engineering technology, which was in its nascent stages at the time of *The Snow Leopard*'s publication, should consider Buddhist principles, in its non-hierarchical structures of compassion for all living entities, including all societies and cultures, when weighing the benefits of climate engineering (Lawrence). A scientist by trade, Lawrence does not cloud Buddhism and spiritual development in mysticism, a mysticism which often contributes to the nebulous perception of Eastern thought that creates the illusion of a barrier to entry for Western cultures.

> He [Lawrence] also actively supports whole person development as a component of planetary health, including exploring the common ground between the personal transformations and systemic transformations that will be associated with sustainable

> development, as well as the mindsets needed to bring these into harmony (Prof. Dr. Mark Lawrence, IASS Potsdam).

Peter Matthiessen published his nonfiction book *The Snow Leopard* in 1978. If Matthiessen wrote *The Snow Leopard* 40 years later, he may have included the exact words Lawrence uses to frame sustainable development within a greater incorporation of spirituality and Buddhism. Nonetheless, this thesis will argue that Matthiessen included these thoughts within the text, and the implications for understanding and further research are all embedded in *The Snow Leopard*. The text itself is well known, yet has not received much scholarly attention, even after the death of the author in 2014. There are very few scholarly articles specifically analyzing Matthiessen's work, but the few that are available are used in this thesis.

Before framing this thesis around the main argument of Buddhism and Eastern thought contributing to a new calibration of our modern ecological thought, it will help the reader to present a passage that captures the environmental realities Matthiessen encountered in *The Snow Leopard*:

> One day this boy and others will destroy that forest, and their steep fields will erode in rain, and the thin soil will wash away into the torrents, clogging the river channels farther down so that monsoon floods will spread across the land. With its rapidly increasing population, primitive agriculture, and steep terrain, Nepal has the most serious erosion problem of any country in the world, and the problem worsens as more forests disappear in the scouring of the land for food and fuel (Matthiessen, 116).

The above passage illustrates how aware Matthiessen was of the reality soon set to afflict the region in which he was expeditioning, almost 40 years ago in Nepal. The book, as this thesis will make clear, contains a rare awareness that reached Western audiences at the time, as it combines the intelligent observation from a North American nature writer, with a deeply spiritual journey into meditation and Buddhism. The relevance within the text to the escalating climate change has only increased as the stakes of our global climate challenge has become the most important aspect of 21st Century life. If "civilized men imagine ourselves to be apart from the land, and from our fellow creatures, we shall attempt to exploit them for our private gain, and the attempt will kill us" (Tester, qtd. in Clark, 151). Matthiessen, through his engagement with Buddhist

thought, reimagines a way to be with the land, *within* the land, and this reimagining provides the centralized structure to the main argument of this thesis: that eastern thought differs from western thought, and the spectrum between these poles is where a unified intersection for greater ecological thinking can exist. What Matthiessen achieves in *The Snow Leopard* is a text that "becomes an ecological force within culture by translating the encounter of human and nonhuman life… and inscribes the shared coexistence with the natural world into the long-term cultural imaginary" (Zapf, 32).

Matthiessen traveled through the Himalayas with George Schaller, an expert field biologist, who used his ecological expertise to frame certain issues to Matthiessen:

> In GS's view, Asia is fifteen to twenty years behind East Africa in its attitudes toward conservation, and the gap may well prove fatal. All of the region from western India to Turkey, and all of northern Africa as well, has turned to desert in historic times, and yet a country such as Pakistan, with but 3 percent of its territories left in forest, is doing nothing at all about the impending disaster, despite a huge idle standing army—sponsored, of course, by military-industrial interests in the United States—that could just as well be out in the weary countryside planting new trees (Matthiessen, 117-18).

These passages are quoted at length because they set the stage for the implications of Matthiessen's text, as well as for the larger arguments contained in this thesis. Both Matthiessen and Schaller had their individual reasons for embarking on their journey, which will be discussed at length throughout the thesis. In the above passage, Matthiessen is using Schaller's expertise to understand the impending future for Asia, as well as documenting the realities of environmental change across a larger region. This broad historical sweep within a paragraph of *The Snow Leopard* calls out the failures of the US, with the country's focus on military-industrial interests over simple actions like 'planting new trees.' Within this final sentence is lodged a space to find another way of approaching the environmental mishandling that has occured since Matthiessen published his book. In *The Snow Leopard*, Matthiessen struggles to fully understand this other way, but within the struggle he opens up the implications of this new perspective, which revolves around Buddhist thought. Matthiessen makes no claim that Buddhism can save the world, or

even himself, but as this thesis will argue, Buddhism and meditation do hold possibilities that can lead to a healthier planet, and a healthier way of being for our human species.

This thesis will aim to analyze Matthiessen's text as a piece of nonfiction literature, which holds a significance that reaches into our current environmental and climate emergency. Buddhism and meditation in *The Snow Leopard* are the main subjects, with a comparison to Western analytical thought as the complimentary piece that binds the possibilities of Matthiessen's text to our current environmental realities. Matthiessen provides the research and writing for the Eastern subjective way of perceiving in *The Snow Leopard*, while Schaller provides, in his text *Stones of Silence*, the Western objective way of understanding and analyzing. At the conclusion of this thesis, it will become clear that neither hemisphere of thought holds the key for our current climate struggle, yet the marriage of both at the intersection of globalized thought processes can strengthen our attention and understanding of how to live and work for a planet that can return to a sustainable state, through a sustainably imagined future.

The Snow Leopard **Synopsis**

The Snow Leopard is a nonfiction narrative written by the two-time National Book Award winning writer, Peter Matthiessen. It is worth mentioning that Matthiessen is the only writer to have received the NBA in both fiction (*Shadow Country*), and nonfiction (*The Snow Leopard*). In the nonfiction narrative, undertaken in 1973 but published in 1978, Matthiessen uses his talents as a naturalist to observe and document the extraordinary journey he and George B. Schaller experience through the Inner Dolpo mountain region of Nepal, on their way to the Crystal Mountain Monastery. Schaller spent time with Matthiessen in Africa doing field work, and invited him on the Himalayan expedition. It is noteworthy that Schaller was quickly becoming renowned as "the finest field biologist working today" (Matthiessen, 35), at the time of the expedition. Schaller provided extraordinary company for Matthiessen, though the writer's reasons for embarking were far different from the biologist's.

Matthiessen had recently been pulled further into the orbit of Zen Buddhist thought through his wife, Deborah Love. Her tragic loss to cancer spurred him to seek something on this journey, either closure, catharsis, or the truly elusive snow leopard. This is one of the unresolved tensions that allow the narrative to maintain its richness. As Matthiessen states in the brief prologue: "to go step by step across the greatest range on earth... was a true pilgrimage, a journey of the heart" (13). What exactly this journey is, must be discovered by the reader over the course of the narrative.

After the prologue, the narrative is organized in four sections. The first two are situated directionally, *Westward* and *Northward*. The penultimate section is *At Crystal Mountain*, which is situated spatially. The final portion is Matthiessen's return, *The Way Home*. Throughout the journey for Matthiessen, it is his Buddhist studies, meditation practice, and the natural landscape that provide the independent material that creates the form of the text. Equally important is Schaller, and the porters and sherpas, who prove indispensable to Matthiessen's framing of the journey in relation to his meditation practice, and blossoming Buddhist study.

Matthiessen gives his readers a taste of what kind of pilgrimage he is seeking to experience with the first epigraph, quoting Lama Govinda, that precedes the *Westward* section: "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" (19). Matthiessen knows why he has accepted this journey with Schaller, though he also understands there are things he is seeking that he has no vision of yet, which provides a clear binary between the two men's thoughts.

What is interesting about the *Westward* section, as compared to later sections, is that Matthiessen explicitly notes some of the destruction done to the region: "Forest-cutting and poaching cleared them out" (23), "in Asia more than all places on earth, it is crucial to establish wildlife sanctuaries at once, before the last animals are overwhelmed" (24). Once more, as quoted earlier, "Nepal has the most serious erosion problem of any country in the world, and the problem worsens as more forests disappear in the scouring of the land for food and fuel" (31). Later in the text, Matthiessen becomes engaged with the materiality around him in a more immediate and spiritual sense, different from these early passages on the destruction of the local

habitat and environment, as if the earlier passages come from a land surveyor, and the later passages from a practitioner of Buddhism and meditation.

Northward, the longest section of Matthiessen's narrative, is also preceded by epigraphs - similar to the other sections. These epigraphs are characteristically vague, yet in their own ways do crystallize the singular depth that Matthiessen reached for, though could not communicate to us, nor himself, as in the following quote by Hermann Hesse: "and in the end one grew old and looked cunning...or wise... and still one knew nothing perhaps, was still waiting and listening" (qtd. in Matthiessen, 73). This line of thought, the ultimate unknowability of all, is traced through different cultures and voices of the past throughout the narrative - though of course, Matthiessen's own voice permeates too: "Yet love was there, half-understood, never quite finished" (78). *Northward* finds Matthiessen going deeper into the mountains, and after a brief engagement with his inner reactions to Deborah's absence from mortality, he settles in to what substantiates most of the section: spiritual ruminations in the high altitude air : "I am not here to seek the 'crazy wisdom'; if I am, I shall never find it. I am here to be here" (110). Interspersed between the tides of spirituality, Matthiessen is ever-diligent in his naturalist observations: "the great pines still clinging to the inaccessible corners of this canyon are monuments to a ruined wilderness" (122). Matthiessen is dutiful to the responsibilities of the naturalist, which helps cement one of the foundational arguments of this thesis: that Buddhism, meditation and spirituality can augment a more sustainable way of engaging with the world, without taking away from an objective view of nature.

Matthiessen, Schaller, and what's left of the rotating cast of porters and sherpas reach the intended destination in the *At Crystal Mountain* section. Matthiessen informs the reader that, although their journey had been heroic due to the timing in late fall and early winter, which meant snowfall, capricious weather, and treacherous mountain passes, the pilgrimage was by no means concluded when they reached the monastery: "in summer, this monument of rock is a shrine for pilgrims from all over Dolpo and beyond" (173); this signifies that the destination is equally as important as the journey.

While at Crystal Mountain, Matthiessen and GS have time to settle into the observational task that drove their quest in a literal and scientific sense: observing the bharal, as well as hoping

to catch a glimpse of the majestic snow leopard.[1] They also witness "the most exciting wolf hunt I [they] ever saw", which, according to GS, "was worth walking five weeks just to see" (184). These unexpected occurrences are brought to life by Matthiessen, the student of Zen who disciplined himself to be in the here, the now of the present, "to strive for permanence in what I think I have perceived is to miss the point" (227).

Matthiessen himself became a dedicated follower of Zen Buddhism before he embarked on his expedition to the Himalayas. *The Snow Leopard* is, in its most essential distillation, a journey and quest of spiritual pursuit – a pilgrimage for Matthiessen to discover and empower his blossoming Buddhist perspectives, "burdened with Western baggage we may have to strip down too, ditch the assumption that a quest has to have an end, for instance, and that the 'I' of the storyteller is really the narrator" (Mabey, *The Snow Leopard*, vii). It will also be a challenge, as Mabey outlines in his introduction to Matthiessen's text, because "language is suspect in Buddhism, one of the layers of illusion to be transcended by meditation. It is sometimes referred to as a 'dirty pane of glass' between person and the world" (xiv).

Finally, Matthiessen must leave Crystal Mountain, to make it back home before the heavy snows arrive. In this final section, the reader can sense his subdued mood. The modern world, or at least the world Matthiessen previously inhabited, comes back to him in melancholic fits: "in spiritual ambition, I have neglected my children and done myself harm, and there is no way back. Nor has anything changed; I am still beset by the same old lusts and ego and emotions...I look forward to nothing" (272). Matthiessen will continue: seeking, searching, and "when you are ready," Buddhists say, "the teacher will appear" (287). In *The Snow Leopard*, Matthiessen was searching for much, but ultimately, his quest for a teacher was thwarted. He was left with a mostly bitter, lesser sweet consummation at the end of his pilgrimage. This ending does not take away from the benefits of a Buddhist perspective, especially when overlapping Eastern ways of thought with Western ways of thought, as given treatment in the chapter analyzing Schaller's *Stones of Silence*. Ultimately, readers of this thesis will come to their own conclusions about whether or not a Buddhist way of perceiving can augment our current environmental malaise. What cannot be argued is that Matthiessen and Schaller's collaboration

[1] The bharal is a Himalayan blue sheep.

had a great cross-pollination effect on both men. Their cognitive and spiritual juxtaposition created the space in which one can effectively argue that there is a legitimate possibility of Buddhism intersecting with Western analytical thought to create a more sustainable and imagined future for humans individually, and for our societies collectively.

Project Scope and Thesis Structure

"The question to ask once such a paradigm shift occurs is how the new perception of the world can be conveyed in terms of literary expression" (Raglon, 247). The primary impetus for this thesis originates from an inversion of Raglon's question, which is closer to how "a perception of interrelatedness must be translated into a way of living or being in the world" (247): instead of asking how literary expression can follow a paradigm shift related to ecological awareness, this thesis will attempt to understand how Matthiessen's literary expression in *The Snow Leopard* can lead to new ecological perceptions of the world, and a new way of 'being in the world,' particularly for western readers.

The first chapter will analyze Matthiessen's treatment of Buddhism in *The Snow Leopard*. It serves as an introduction to Buddhism, which sets up the foundation of eastern thought as conceptualized in the text and throughout the thesis. This foundation will then be utilized to set up the dichotomy to western thought in the second chapter, which analyzes Schaller's *Stones of Silence* as the primary source of scientific objective thinking. The dichotomy between the two modes of thought, as conceptualized through Matthiessen and Schaller, will cement the conflict that presents itself when attempting to clarify and understand the problematic intersection of both polarities of thought. After the first two chapters incorporating Buddhism and western thought, the final chapter will focus on Matthiessen's practice of meditation within *The Snow Leopard*. The meditation chapter will use a close reading approach primarily focused on Matthiessen's meditation practice within *The Snow Leopard*. An additional synthesis with the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism will also be incorporated, which assists in functionalizing the final chapter's theoretical four pillars of meditation in Matthiessen's practice, as related to the Four Noble Truths. The final chapter contains the most theoretical aspects of this thesis. The

ultimate goal is to illustrate how a specific eastern practice can create eastern ways of perceiving, which will then augment the final thesis statement: that eastern thought provides a perceptual and phenomenological tool that can strengthen western thought, ultimately leading to a more sustainable and ecologically aware consciousness.

Chapter One: Buddhism Encountering Science

The Snow Leopard has been called "an exquisite book of nature and travel writing… a grand Buddhist parable" (Outside Magazine, October 1992). Matthiessen's text can be analyzed in many directions when considering the topic of Buddhism, but the relevance for this thesis is the way his relation to Buddhism infuses his relation to the world: "trekking through the Himalayas—talking, reading, thinking, writing—Matthiessen confronts directly the relations between human culture, the self, and nature" (Allister, 126). The implications for these confrontations are even more at stake as the human species moves along in the 21st century, confronted by rapidly escalating climate destruction. Scientists have been sounding the alarm over climate change, with successful lobbying for immediate action that has seen political cooperation between countries in the common goal of setting policies that aim to reduce the catastrophic impact post-industrial life has had on the planet. As Matthiessen writes:

> The progress of the sciences toward theories of fundamental unity, cosmic symmetry (as in the unified field theory)—how do such theories differ, in the end, from that unity which Plato called 'unspeakable" and 'indiscribable,' the holistic knowledge shared by so many peoples of the earth, Christians included, before the advent of the industrial revolution made new barbarians of the peoples of the West?" (Matthiessen, 225).

Matthiessen describes here the paradox that was apparent to him 40 years ago, and has become even more critical in the decades since: the advance of science has led to technology that is now understood as leading to the rapid decline of the health of our planet, but the same advance in science is also the key to reversing the damage done, holding the key for a healthier future of our world. Matthiessen claims that the people of the West are new 'barbarians', though this conveniently leaves out people of the East, which is a problematic demarcation. Now, with the rise of China as a global techno-industrial power, as well as of Japan, Korea, and other advanced Asian nations, the divide between the East and the West is blurred.

Matthiessen claims that the holistic knowledge of 'so many peoples of the earth', which assumably denotes indigenous people, and non-industrialized societies, as well as Christians

before the industrial revolution, is not a knowledge that is necessarily definable. This undefinability is seen in science as a knowledge gap, something to understand, and to classify. What Buddhism teaches, though, is that not everything is definable, nor should we attempt to define everything. An example of this is found in one of Matthiessen's sources, where D.T. Suzuki describes this very predicament: "such people, looking at Zen more or less conceptually, consider Zen utterly absurd and ludicrous, or deliberately making itself unintelligible in order to guard its apparent profundity against outside criticism" (Suzuki, 3). Unintelligibility is anathema to science's methods of inquiry. If Suzuki were to comment on the unified field theory that Matthiessen cites, he would say that "the human tongue is not an adequate organ for expressing the deepest truths of Zen. The latter cannot be made the subject of logical exposition; they are to be experienced in the innermost soul when they become for the first time intelligible" (Suzuki, 3). This is precisely the impenetrable wall that science cannot perceive, therefore it mystifies the entire enterprise, which is a mistake. Suzuki speaks of Zen as an inner spiritual experience, and as a mystical practice. There is a difference between mystical and mystify, which is a crucial hinge point between Eastern and Western thought towards Zen Buddhism:

> Zen is the keynote of Oriental culture; it is what makes the West frequently fail to fathom exactly the depths of the Oriental mind, for mysticism in its very nature defies the analysis of logic, and logic is the most characteristic feature of Western thought. The East is synthetic in its method of reasoning; it does not care so much for the elaboration of particulars as for a comprehensive grasp of the whole… Therefore the Eastern mind, if we assume its existence, is necessarily vague and indefinite, and seems not to have an index which at once reveals the contents to an outsider… Zen is provokingly evasive (5).

The 'provokingly evasive' quality of Zen is what Matthiessen understands through the snow leopard journey, and it is his unique position that bridges the gap between the scientific mind and the Zen Buddhist mind.

1.1 Buddhist Concept of Time and Space

In a discussion with Schaller in the *Westward* section, which will will be analyzed further in the second chapter, Matthiessen encounters the field biologist's skepticism towards Eastern thought, which Matthiessen uses as an opportunity to bring in Einstein's theory of relativity, as well as a linguistic analysis of how reality could be explained to indigenous people such as the Hopi:[2]

> ...but it is also true that in recent years, Western scientists have turned with new respect toward the intuitive sciences of the East. Einstein repeatedly expressed suspicion of the restrictions of linear thought, concluding that propositions arrived at by purely logical means were completely empty of reality even if one could properly explain what 'reality' means; it was intuition, he declared, that had been crucial to his thinking. And there are close parallels in the theory of relativity to the Buddhist concept of the identity of time and space, which, like Hindu cosmology, derives from the ancient teachings of the Vedas. Somewhere, Einstein remarks that his theory could be readily explained to Indians of the Uto-Aztecan languages, which include the Pueblo and the Hopi. ('The Hopi does not say 'the light flashed' but merely 'flash,' without subject or time element; time cannot move because it is also space. The two are never separated; there are no words or expressions referring to time or space as separate from each other (Matthiessen, 223-24).

Matthiessen writes that Western scientists had turned towards the modes of thought of the East, or the 'intuitive sciences' - and this was written 40 years ago. A line of inquiry for another paper could also examine how the West's turn towards the East, in specific regards to scientific ways of thinking when considering Eastern spiritual practices, has developed and evolved since the time of Matthiessen's writing. In this passage, Matthiessen provides a historical-linguistic answer with the pre-industrial people of the Hopi in a quest for a theory of unity.

There is a discrepancy between what Suzuki claims in his *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* however, and what Matthiessen references with Einstein and the Hopi. Suzuki claims that human language is not capable of expressing the true reality of Zen Buddhism, but Einstein is claiming that it is possible, due to the linguistic constituents of the Hopi language. It is peculiar that Sukuki cannot grasp this possibility, because his mother tongue is Japanese. In Japanese, there is not necessarily an inseparability between time and space, but the language itself is often used in

[2] Native Americans in the Southwest region of what is now the United States.

the same way as Einstein is referencing with the Hopi: if a light flashes in a room, a Japanese speaker will often say 閃いた, which is read ‘hirameita’; they also omit the subject and time element in their language. This method of using their language is not only foreign to Indo-European speakers, but also seems inherently incorrect as a way of framing the realities westerners confront in the world. What Suzuki and Matthiessen are conceptualizing, however, is a very important idea if Zen Buddhism, and more broadly Eastern ways of thinking, is to be incorporated into Western ways of thinking. The idea is that human language frames reality in different ways, depending on the culture in which the language formed, and these discrepancies need to be understood if a greater collaboration between the currents of thought can be bridged. There is an argument that is outside the scope of this thesis, which is the question of whether “languages lead their speakers to different thoughts and perceptions?” (Deutscher, 6). Deutscher claims that for most scholars, the answer is a definitive no. Deutscher then proceeds to argue against the majority of scholars. For the purpose of understanding Zen Buddhism through Matthiessen, it is less important to think of languages themselves as leading to different thoughts and perceptions, and to think more of how Eastern cultures have led to different thoughts that are embedded in the cultural conditioning of their societies, namely through Buddhism.

1.2 Buddhism and Interrelatedness

Richard Nisbett in *The Geography of Thought* uses a remark from a former student of his that led to his analysis of the differences in relation to Eastern and Western thought. The student said: “you know, the difference between you and me is that I think the world is a circle, and you think it’s a line… They [Eastern people] search for relationships between things, and they think you can’t understand the part without understanding the whole” (Nisbett, xviii). This circle that the student speaks of is similar to the way Zen Buddhism conceives of the world. Nisbett further explains this idea with an example that contains three images: one of a chicken, one of grass, and one of a cow. He remarks that Westerners, when asked which two images belong together, often choose the chicken and the cow, because they belong to the category of animals. Easterners, however, are more likely to group the cow and grass together, because “the cow eats grass” (141). If this fundamental difference is present between mere images, it becomes much more

complicated when accounting for differentiations in how cultural perceptions are composed in relation to the world.

Mark Lawrence, as referenced in the introduction, is interested in the relationship and interdependence of all things in nature, including humans. Lawrence paraphrases from an article in the Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture, by lead author Till Markus, which is again worth quoting:

> the authors devote particular attention to the concept of interrelatedness: according to Buddhist tradition, humans are inextricably linked to nature and each other in a relationship that is non-hierarchical. The full realisation of this interdependence can help us to overcome our egocentric wishes and become more aware, more compassionate, and less destructive to our environment (Lawrence, 2).

To relate this passage to the example of the chicken, cow, and grass, Lawrence might say that, instead of the Westerner approach to group the animals together in a category that is other than human, it would be more beneficial for the planet to group the cow and the grass together because of their non-hierarchical interrelatedness. Instead of taxonomizing flora and fauna in straight lines, it could be more beneficial to use the Chinese way of thinking about relations in a circle.

Matthiessen quotes Werner Heisenberg as an example of a scientist who does incorporate Eastern ways of thinking into his scientific pursuits:

> Modern science classifies the world . . . not into different groups of objects but into different groups of connections. . . . The world thus appears to be a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole (Matthiessen, 231).

This passage apparently denies that modern science classifies objects in taxonomic categories, but the assertion is tenuous when considering the example of Schaller's work and discussions with Matthiessen, which will become apparent in chapter two.

Another way to look at Buddhism is through what David Abram claims in *The Spell of the Sensuous*: "this reciprocity, the circular manner in which a nuanced sense of self emerges only through a deepening relation with other beings, is regularly acknowledged in Buddhism as

the ‘dependent co-arising of self and other’ (Abram, 298-9). Here again the idea of thought as circular arises, in relation to a sense of self that can only be developed when in unison with all of the aspects of nature that humans encounter. In Abram’s book, he is focused on the senses as a gateway to unison with nature, which Matthiessen practices in *The Snow Leopard* through Buddhism, and even Schaller himself, in a passage quoted in the next chapter, practiced when he detached himself from his field biology to reacquaint his senses with the other objects of nature outside the scope of his scientific inquiry.

Matthiessen would agree with Abram when the latter states:

> The differentiation of my senses, as well as their spontaneous convergence in the world at large, ensures that I am a being destined for relationship: it is primarily through my engagement with what is *not* me that I effect the integration of my senses, and thereby experience my own unity and coherence (125).

Matthiessen is on an inner search as much as anything in *The Snow Leopard*, but his senses, as Abram claims, are on a perpetual path of convergence with everything that is not himself. This is how we can reach a state of unity with the world, or, for Matthiessen using the lens of Zen Buddhism - Truth. In an example of this, we can look to a meditation passage where Matthiessen engages his senses, “I lower my gaze from the snow peaks to the glistening thorns, the snow patches, the lichens. Though I am blind to it, the Truth is near, in the reality of what I sit on—rocks” (Matthiessen, 638). Matthiessen pulls his sense of sight from the snow peaks, down to the smaller scale objects around him. He then uses this same sense of sight to claim that he is blind, but in an undefined sense understands that ‘the Truth is near’ in the form of his immediate reality. He is engaging what Abrams claims is not him, in this case, his attention is drawn to the rocks he is sitting on, which inform his sense of touch: “these hard rocks instruct my bones in what my brain could never grasp in the Heart Sutra, that ‘form is emptiness, and emptiness is form’—the Void, the emptiness of blue-black space, contained in everything. Sometimes when I meditate, the big rocks dance” (638-39). Matthiessen receives instruction from the rocks, in a way his brain cannot understand, recalling the Suzuki passage about the deepest truth being inaccessible to the human tongue, or in Matthiessen’s case, his brain. Matthiessen is attempting to reach this truth through his senses, and then ultimately through his meditation practice. An

interesting point to go further into is the void that Matthiessen speaks of. In this passage, it is a vague concept, an 'emptiness of blue-black space, contained in everything,' but in an earlier passage from the *Westward* section, Matthiessen defines very clearly a more profound idea of this void, which comes from Buddhist thought:

> each breath we take contains hundreds of thousands of the inert, pervasive argon atoms that were actually breathed in his lifetime by the Buddha, and indeed contain parts of the 'snorts, sighs, bellows, shrieks' of all creatures that ever existed, or will ever exist. These atoms flow backward and forward in such useful but artificial constructs as time and space, in the same universal rhythms, universal breath as the tides and stars, joining both the living and the dead in that energy which animates the universe (235-36).

In the first sentence in this passage, Matthiessen quotes Harlow Shapley, an American astronomer, before continuing in his own words. Matthiessen is contemplating the void and the emptiness that is contained in everything, yet he links this void to all of the energy that 'animates the universe,' calling it the 'universal breath.' In Zen Buddhism, this emptiness is more difficult to grasp, which is how the marriage of Zen Buddhism and modern science can become so profound: "today science is telling us what the Vedas have taught mankind for three thousand years, that we do not see the universe as it is" (237-38). Again, recalling the Eastern way of thinking of life as a circle, Matthiessen's text is informing us that all atoms of energy remain within the universe, not in a linear way, in the 'artificial constructs of time and space,' but in a way more akin to the Hopi and Japanese way of understanding a flash of energy, devoid of the accoutrements of subject and time, simply as they are: a flash.

1.3 Directly Experiencing Reality

In *The Snow Leopard*, Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism in particular, takes up a significant amount of the textual space in Matthiessen's attempts to understand and explore a life lived through the practice of Zen. Yet this is not reflected in the reality of the language used by Matthiessen; the word Zen is found only 88 times in the text, which does not count all of the indirect references. For comparison, the word river is used 267 times, the word mountain is used 411 times, and the

word wind is used 208 times. There are two possibilities for this: by incorporating fundamental objects of nature on his journey, Matthiessen attempts to understand reality by perceiving the physical objects he encounters directly, without suffusing the experience with superfluous overlays of Zen Buddhist language references; the second possibility is that Matthiessen crossed more rivers, saw more mountains, and felt the wind more often than he wrote of Zen Buddhism. These two binary modes of thought are not mutually exclusive, and in fact display the balance Matthiessen tried to achieve by using Eastern thought with his culturally conditioned Western way of thinking. As outlined in Allister's analysis of *The Snow Leopard*, who claims that the Eastern way of thinking has "no need to articulate or even consciously understand what has been experienced" (Allister, 129). What is found in Matthiessen's work is a mixture of both, but with a constant self-reflective quality as to how he experienced the reality he encountered.

Matthiessen spent years revising *The Snow Leopard*, and it is not, and cannot, be a pure reflection of his experiences for two reasons: Matthiessen used a historical lens to revise his own work, because the text necessarily changed once he engaged with it outside of the environment in which it was contextually placed; second, Matthiessen's qualities as a writer do not transcend the subjectivities of human observation - the 'mere words' that Matthiessen wrote about are always an obstacle to the direct experiencing of reality, though his efforts bring the reader close to what an Eastern way of thinking can be. As Allister writes: "all autobiographers dramatize, implicitly if not explicitly, that their books are fusions of two stories, past and present, the events as they were lived through and the autobiographical act that constructs those events into story" (142). *The Snow Leopard* is a constructed work, and however successfully Matthiessen used a Zen Buddhist lens to encounter the life he was living on the journey, there is no way to separate the autobiographical act. The autobiographical act erases the ability for Matthiessen to perfectly transpose the Eastern way of direct experience, as it something the reader must do themselves - but he does succeed in getting close.

1.4 Zapf's Unmediated Perception of Reality and Nature

Another way to look at this autobiographical and experienced temporal binary is through the idea of textual sustainability. While the revisionist, autobiographical aspect of Matthiessen's text creates a barrier for the reader to experience what Matthiessen directly experienced, there is the possibility of achieving an alternative understanding that is equally as enriching: there is "no self-evident or objectively given set of properties but a *potentiality* of texts that only comes alive through its ever new actualizations within always changing historical, social, and individual conditions" (Zapf, 26). This *potentiality*, as Zapf describes it, leads to a sustainability within the circulation of texts, which, in the example of Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard*, can actually lead to a literal sustainable mode of thought, based off the argument of this thesis: that Matthiessen's exploration of Zen Buddhism can lead to a synthesis with Western thought that can reimagine our ecological future.

Zapf is not claiming this, in fact he states that his sustainable text theory is *not* "a concept that would support a notion of literature as a mere anthropotechnology of civilizational self-domestication" (26). Rather, Zapf believes in the transformative power of literature as a vehicle that contributes to the perpetual "self-renewal within society and culture" (26), tied to aesthetic experimentation and innovative function that literary texts provide. Zapf is using his theory to foundationalize a novel idea of the novel, of imaginative literature in fictional texts. His theory can just as easily be applied and expanded to incorporate Matthiessen's text within the umbrella of what he calls *sustainable texts*.

An additional and more easily synced idea of Zapf's can be applied to Matthiessen's text, which can also bring in the idea of Buddhism: Zapf discusses an "*unmediated* perception of reality and nature beyond linguistic and cultural categories" (45). Matthiessen's engagement with Zen Buddhism could not be summarized in a more succinct line. Zapf is outlining how Eastern thought perceives, or attempts to perceive, the world. A Western way of thinking, which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter, would include more of "an awareness of the inevitable textual and cultural 'framing' of all human knowledge and depiction of the nonhuman environment" (45). As a nature writer, Matthiessen includes this half of the Eastern-Western binary in his writing, but the fusion of the two polarities of thought create a "focus on the local, personal, and experiential dimensions of environmental writing, fusing autobiography and

scientific observation… emphasizing the need to link local and personal ecologies with transpersonal and cross-cultural aspects of ecological thought in a globalized world" (46).

Linking Zapf's literature as cultural ecology theory, which is a "concrete scholarly project" (81) to Matthiessen's nonfiction text on nature and Zen Buddhism is not difficult when Zapf outlines the basis of his theory: "[it] examines the various ways in which the functions, structures, and evolutionary processes of human cultures as reflected in art and literature are interconnected and dependent on processes of nature" (81). The interconnectedness and dependence of humans - reflected in art and literature - embedded in the processes of nature are central to the teachings of Buddhism. The act of meditation, the primary practice of Zen Buddhism, is a reflection of this interconnectedness: "some have speculated that meditation began with hunting, when people - usually men, while the women gathered the bulk of the calories that kept the group alive - sat still for hours, paying close attention to what they saw, heard, and smelled around them" (Ives, 70). Ives goes on to quote Flynn Johnson in regards to our indigenous spirituality that is "the primal, intuitive, embodied part of humanity that lived for many thousands of years in an immediate and intimate connection with the rhythms and beings of the natural world and that still resides within our genetic and spiritual makeup just beneath the thin masks of civilization" (Johnson, qtd. in Ives, 71). The spiritual evolution of humanity blossomed into different strands of spiritual practices, and Matthiessen's engagement with Zen Buddhism through the text of *The Snow Leopard* emphasizes "relationality and interconnectedness" without "neglecting the very real differences and boundaries that continue to exist" (Zapf, 81-2). Zapf writes of boundaries between cultures and social systems, and it could easily be transposed to highlight the cultural boundaries between Eastern and Western thought that Matthiessen struggles to harmonize.

Using the idea of relationality and interconnectedness to understand how Matthiessen wrote about a direct, and *unmediated* perception of reality is found in a passage from the *Westward* section. Matthiessen uses a river to explain a doctrine of Sayamuni, the Buddha: "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" (Matthiessen, 102-103). This usage of river, though Matthiessen is recycling it

from Sayamuni's teaching, illustrates how Matthiessen attempts to understand reality through direct experience. There is no description of the river in this passage that includes what it might look like, only that it appears as it did the night before. This is only an appearance, however, as it is not the same river because it has 'passed away.' It is an example of how Matthiessen uses Buddhism to recalibrate his direct experiencing of natural objects. As an observer, Matthiessen sees the river as an object, but as an embedded part of nature, Matthiessen is interconnected to the river, because the river is undergoing the same process that Matthiessen is, it is 'passing away' in a perpetual state of 'becoming.' It is the same object in appearance, but its substance has changed.

Later on in the *Westward* section, Matthiessen describes a river in his own terms: "rocks tremble and bound into the river, which after two days of heavy rain is rushing, roaring, lunging through the canyon" (151). The river is described in poetic terms, and Matthiessen is directly experiencing it through the action of the river itself, through the 'rushing, roaring, lunging.' There is no description of what the river looks like, rather Matthiessen describes the movements of the river, what he is directly experiencing, as if the river were an animal he is trying to describe. It is an example of how "another self merges into a 'oneness' with plant and animal life in this ecosystem that few Westerners have visited" (Allister, 131). Matthiessen, through Zen Buddhism, attempts this merging into a 'oneness,' or unity, with the plant and animal life - rivers included - he encounters.

Using a different natural object, a mountain, the same conclusion of how Matthiessen uses Zen Buddhism to better understand his reality can be illustrated: "on a high wooded ridge, however, he [Schaller] locates two Himalayan tahr, an archaic animal that is a transitional form between goat-antelopes and goats. Under the sky, the dark creatures are still, yet they give life to the whole mountain" (Matthiessen, 266-67). Different from the direct experience of the river's movement in the previous passage, Matthiessen uses the mountain here to illustrate the unity of the relation in nature between animals and natural objects, the interconnectedness of everything. Matthiessen does not describe the mountain through the mountain's physical qualities, but rather he uses the Himalayan tahr to infuse life *into* the whole mountain. This is an example of the Eastern way of using relational thinking to understand the reality presented to Matthiessen:

> one of the basic issues he [Matthiessen] explores is how he can trust his interpretation of what he sees, which leads him to his experiential insights about the differences between Western and Eastern ways of seeing... because he knows that Western modes of perception can hinder understanding of Eastern experience, he studies Zen Buddhism to help him shape his observations of and reflections (Allister, 143).

Allister brings up an important point here, that Matthiessen is using Zen Buddhism to shape his thinking, but Matthiessen is not discarding the benefits of Westerns perceptions. Rather, throughout *The Snow Leopard*, Matthiessen attempts to understand the differences between the two ways of thinking, which leads him to insights which help the reader better understand how Zen Buddhism, whether practiced or not, can help infuse a Western mind into a more direct experiencing of reality, and ultimately, a more balanced and sustainable way of thinking.

Chapter Two: *Stones of Silence*

2.1 Schaller's Western Mind and Matthiessen's Buddhist Influences

This second chapter will focus on Matthiessen's companion George Schaller, the man whom Peter Matthiessen journeys to Crystal Mountain with. He is the reason Matthiessen had the chance for the journey at all. While expressing gratitude towards Schaller, Matthiessen also stays true to his writing ethos of uncompromising observation of what he encounters. Naturally, this includes Schaller's parallel orbit, which is very different in philosophical trajectory to Matthiessen's. Schaller is a true scientist - a field biologist, ecologist, and zoologist -, and he, as portrayed in *The Snow Leopard* at the outset, has very little understanding or patience for what Matthiessen is searching for. Though this is Matthiessen's portrayal of Schaller, and as this chapter will show, it is not an entirely accurate one. The goal of understanding Schaller's work is to situate the relation to the context of Matthiessen's writing. The comparison is necessary to the overall argument of this thesis, that Eastern thought can provide sustainable perspectives that can illuminate weaknesses in a solely objective way of encountering the world, considered by both Schaller and Matthiessen to be the Western point of view.

To provide a launching point, there is an exchange between the two men from the *At Crystal Mountain* section of *TSL* that sets up the dichotomy between Eastern and Western ways of thought: "'you have to have something coming in!" But the point of meditation is to let everything go: "when your mind is empty like a valley or a canyon, then you will know the power of the Way"" (Matthiessen, 619-20). This profound exchange between the men might seem to illustrate the distinct ideological fault lines that separate the two, but in fact, Matthiessen is not the only one who wrote a book that incorporated Eastern thought. Schaller published a much lesser known work to Matthiessen's. Schaller's book is called *Stones of Silence*, first published in 1980, two years after the first publication of *The Snow Leopard*. It is "a story told in the words of a poet yet seen through the eyes of a scientist" (University of Chicago Press). This blurb doesn't exactly fit the description we often get through Matthiessen's writing: "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' (Matthiessen, 67). If an analysis of Matthiessen's work is based on the assumption that what he wrote attempted to conform to objective observations, then it is important to fact check. The passage about Schaller indicates, at least before the snow leopard journey, that their previous work together in Africa did not impress Matthiessen regarding Schaller's ability to gracefully encounter modes of thought that were not strictly scientific.[3]

Before looking into Schaller's writing, it is helpful to prop up our investigation with Matthiessen's point of view:

> Our speculations about the Crystal Monastery have led inevitably to talk of Buddhism and Zen. Last year, as a way of alerting GS to my unscientific preoccupations, I sent him a small book entitled *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Very politely, he had written, 'many thanks for the Zen book, which Kay brought with her to Pakistan. I've only browsed a bit so far. A lot of it seems most sensible, some of it less so, but I have to ponder things some more.' GS refuses to believe that the Western mind can truly absorb nonlinear Eastern perceptions; he shares the view of many in the West that Eastern thought evades 'reality' and therefore lacks the courage of existence. But the courage-to-be, right here and now and nowhere else, is precisely what Zen, at least, demands: eat when you eat, sleep when you sleep! Zen has no patience with 'mysticism,' far less the occult, although its emphasis on the enlightenment experience (called *kensho* or *satori*) is what sets it apart from other religions and philosophies (Matthiessen, 221).

There is a lot to unpack with this passage, but the most relevant kernel for the immediate line of inquiry is Matthiessen's assertion that Schaller does not 'believe that the Western mind can truly absorb nonlinear Eastern perceptions.' For this assumption, we must turn to Schaller's writing, for the interior beliefs of his mind are impossible to perfectly capture by Matthiessen's writing alone, and Schaller left his source material, which must be consulted. Before looking at Schaller's own writing, it is again worth stating that this particular study between the two men is being undertaken in order to enrich our understanding of Matthiessen's work, specifically his study of Zen Buddhism, and the larger topic of the intersection of Eastern and Western thought

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[3] Their work together was documented in Matthiessen's book *The Tree Where Man Was Born.*

creating a more sustainable way of being. After looking at a few key passages from *Stones of Silence*, there will be an important section of *The Snow Leopard* to return to, in order to further coalesce the thoughts Matthiessen works through related to Zen Buddhism and Eastern thought.

2.2 Nature Is Not an Object of Man's Investigation

In the *Kang Chu* section of *Stones of Silence*, George Schaller is on a journey that is separate from the snow leopard journey he and Peter Matthiessen travelled on. Kang Chu is in Nepal, just near the Tibet border, having been ceded to Nepal in a land exchange in 1961 (Schaller, 177). As Schaller made his journey into Buddhist Nepal, and crossed over to Tibet, there is evidence in his writing that, while scientifically programmed, he expressed interest in the spiritual and cultural environments he encountered. He speaks of leaving the lowland and midland areas that are populated with Hindu tribes, crossing "a cultural barrier into another human world" (178). Schaller is very aware of the cultural environments he is expeditioning through, and we find in the following description the launching point he uses that provides a relevant philosophical inquiry in *Stones of Silence*:

> Like many mountain people, each family here has at least two homes at different altitudes, for with fertile land scarce, they must practice seasonally alternating cultivation. The villagers were not very informative about wildlife. Yes, there were a few tahr around; yes there were blue sheep at Lapche; no, they could not help us find animals. They seemed reticent, held back by an obscure suspiciousness of our persistent questioning. Our attempts to explain the purpose of our visit were probably unsuccessful (179-80).

Here, Schaller underscores what is at first a natural frustration to a field biologist: the villagers, the supposed experts of the local region, were either unwilling, or perhaps not possessing the specific knowledge Schaller was looking for. It is important to note that Schaller had Sherpas with him, whose own Sherpa language overlaps with Tibetan, and the communication was generally remarked as quite good. It is important for this thesis argument to understand the cultural differences, which is what Schaller finds himself up against. Though the Sherpas could

communicate with the villagers in similar tongues, what Schaller is understanding is that the object of communication was as foreign to the locals as if they had descended upon them speaking Ancient Greek.

Schaller then transposes his understanding of Tibetan culture, and Buddhist religion, by chronicling Bhotiya thought, "nature … is not an object of man's investigation; man is one with nature in Buddhist religion, not a privileged being who examines and analyzes everything.[4] My omnivorous probing for fact was alien to them" (180).

Schaller demonstrates his self-awareness, and his understanding of the Eastern way of thought, or at least the way Buddhists see the world. Instead of exclaiming "you have to have something coming in!", he uses the opportunity to ponder the cultural communication divide, launching into a contemplative look at his own way of thinking. Schaller's experience is worth quoting in full, first to understand what his scientific approach to nature resembles in his own writing; second, to provide a supplementary view of how his poetic abilities couple with his scientific mind to create such valuable prose; and third, because the conclusion of the passage provides the crux of his contemplation between Eastern and Western thought:

> A subtle personal incident the following day illustrated this difference in attitude between the Occidental and Eastern minds, although at the time I did not consciously think of my actions. I had surmounted the cliff behind camp to explore the conifer forest there. It was lovely among the straight-stemmed firs and hemlocks, and the understory of gnarled rhododendrons with their reddish bark added a unique distinction to the scene. This east-facing slope, deprived of the sun, was still in winter's grip with snow two feet deep and the rhododendron leaves curled tightly against the cold. As I descended, there suddenly came to me the scent of spring, insistent as if I had strayed into a bed of hyacinths. Nearby, in an opening, a sapling reached above the snow, a *Daphne*, its leafless twigs full of purplish-white blossoms. While admiring its solitary defiance of winter, I also wondered what selective advantage the flowers derived by blooming this

[4] The Bhotiya are Tibetan speaking Buddhist tribes. Quoted in *The Snow Leopard*: "Whether Hindu or Buddhist, most of these tribes … pay respect to the animist deities of the old religions that persist in remote corners of the Asian mountains" (Matthiessen, 107). This respect to animist deities is what Schaller encountered during his communications through a translator with the Bhotiya villagers.

> early, when temperatures still dropped to 20˚. I plucked a petal, crushing it between my fingers to see if this would accentuate the aroma (180).

This passage gives us an understanding of the poetic and descriptive qualities Schaller has as a writer. It certainly gives a more nuanced framing to the descriptions Matthiessen offers us of Schaller in *The Snow Leopard* passages examined so far. For example, towards the end, when Schaller is pondering the *Daphne*, he uses his scientific knowledge when questioning what selective advantage the flower would achieve by blooming earlier than the temperatures dictated. Before that, however, he admires 'its solitary defiance of winter.' This line is not only poetic, but spiritual in a way. He is being present in the moment, noticing the flower as it is - a solitary object in defiance of the elements enveloping it. In the final line, Schaller plucks a petal, and he analyzes it for its possible aromatic accentuations. This leads him to a section where he sources Daisetsu Suzuki from *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist* to explain Eastern thought.[5] Schaller frames this by using an unsourced quotation, only written as 'a scientist recently expressed,' which he quotes anonymously: "and it is deep in our own natures to seek enlightenment about the world and our place in it, and to be exhilarated by its magnificent and challenging answers" (180). Schaller claims this scientist's quote reflects a "mainly Western attitude towards the world" when contemplating ourselves in nature. This attitude could just as easily be found in Buddhism, though, as we find throughout Matthiessen's writing - whether he classifies it as personal enlightenment, or enlightenment through Zen Buddhism, there is a searching, a seeking. Ultimately, readers of *The Snow Leopard* would find it easy to disagree with Schaller's interpretation of the seeking of enlightenment being a Westernly possessed thought pattern. It appears that Schaller is misinterpreting the line. Where Schaller reads of exhilaration at the answers we find in our world, he is imposing his view of classifying and taxonifying phenomena, which is not necessarily how the quote could be interpreted. An Eastern way of thought would not necessarily find a resolution in answers.

Schaller then uses Suzuki's analysis of Alfred Tennyson's *Flower in the Crannied Wall*

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[5] Schaller referenced *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist*, by Suzuki, which is different from the book Matthiessen sent to him, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind.* This demonstrates Schaller's search for deeper understanding in Eastern thought, and especially Zen Buddhism. Whether Matthiessen was aware of this is unclear, as the single inclusion of *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist* in *The Snow Leopard* is when Matthiessen cites it as an endnote in the *Northward* section.

poem:

> Flower in the crannied wall,
> I pluck you out of the crannies;-
> Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
> Little flower - but if I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is (Tennyson, qtd. in Schaller, 181).

This poem is added after Schaller's own pondering of the *Daphne*, and the crushing between his fingers mirrors Tennyson's plucking of the flower out of the crannied wall. The similarities between the two men's experiences are apparent, though Schaller was crushing a petal to ascertain an accentuation in the aroma, whereas Tennyson plucked the flower to ponder its entirety, from root to petal, searching for a meaning to man and God. Schaller then uses Suziki's comparison in a Haiku from Basho, the Japanese poet, whom Matthiessen also quotes once in an epigraph in *The Snow Leopard*:[6]

> When closely inspected
> One notices a nazuna in bloom
> Under the hedge (Basho, qtd. in Schaller, 181).

Before arguing against what is an unbalanced comparison on Suzuki's part, it is necessary to use Suzuki's words to understand how Schaller arrives at his conclusion regarding his own perspective on Eastern points of view:

> When Tennyson noticed the flower in a crannied wall he 'plucked' it and held it in his hand and went on reflecting about it, pursuing his abstract thought about God and man, about the totality of things and the unfathomability of life. This is characteristic of Western man. His mind works analytically. The direction of his thinking is toward the externality or objectivity of things… If he were scientifically minded he would surely bring it to the laboratory, dissect it, and look at it under the microscope… When the scientist finishes his examinations, experimentation, and observation, he will indulge in

[6] Haiku is the well known Japanese style of poetry, structurally composed around a traditional set of "seventeen syllables in three lines," claimed to be "the shortest form of poetry in the world" (Clements, 8).

> all forms of abstract thinking; evolution, heredity, genetics, cosmogeny. Compare all this with Basho and we see how differently the Oriental poet handles his experience. Above all, he does not 'pluck' the flower, he does not mutilate it, he leaves it where he has found it. He does not detach it from the totality of its surroundings… Basho simply refers first to his 'close inspection' which is not necessarily aroused by a purposeful direction of his intention to find something among the bushes; he simply looks casually around and is greeted unexpectedly by the modestly blooming plant which ordinarily escapes one's detection. He bends down and 'closely' inspects it to be assured that it is a nazuna. He is deeply touched by its unadorned simplicity, yet partaking in the glory of its unknown source. He does not say a word about his inner feeling… He makes no allusions whatever to 'God and man,' nor does he express his desire to understand (Suzuki, qtd. in Schaller, 181-2).

Before facing the argument towards both Suzuki and Schaller, there are two more sentences Schaller writes, before unceremoniously moving back to his search for tahr in Kang Chu. Schaller writes, after quoting Suzuki, that he doubts he could ever adapt completely to the Eastern perspective, "the quest for knowledge is too much a part of me… Perhaps being an ecologist is the best compromise, for one attempts to understand nature as unity, as the harmony of living things" (Schaller, 182).

Quoting at length such a long passage from Suzuki, Schaller preserved what is a highly analytical brush of thought. Before unpacking more of Suzuki's words, and ultimately concluding with a comparison to Matthiessen's perspective, it is important to say how little Schaller actually discussed the whole matter of Eastern and Western thought from his own conclusions. He provides his readers with the experience of encountering the *Daphne*, before quoting two poets, and then Suzuki, then bookended the section with his conclusion that being an ecologist was the best choice for him. What Schaller writes at the end is slightly perplexing, as an attempt to understand the unity and harmony within nature fits right in with Buddhist thought, as well as with what Suzuki is ultimately trying to say.

Suzuki's passage is problematic based on two foundations: the comparison of Tennyson's poem with Basho's is apt only in that they are both observing and encountering flowers; second,

Suzuki's comparison of the two poems leaves a lot of contextualization about the way Basho thinks in the moment of his haiku creation, absent. Basho's poetry provides a looking glass into Zen Buddhism, as it does provide excellent inroads into the Zen way of life. Haiku does this because the poetry form reflects a Zen way of life that "transforms the most mundane of moments into something special. In Zen, it is glimpses like these, rather than the study of doctrine, that are said to lead to enlightenment - the realization of the true nature of existence" (Clements, 8). However, looking at the comparison between the two poems, which Schaller claims is 'an illuminating example of a different world view,' it can be argued that Suzuki's analysis is illuminating only in that it presents his personal interpretation of Eastern and Western thought. Whether illuminating or not, it articulates an unfair advantage regarding the poems' structures.

Suzuki chooses a poem by Tennyson, one among hundreds, in which Tennyson plucks a flower. Suzuki could have chosen another poem by Tennsyon, and with a quick search of Tennyson's poems on public domain, I can choose one that supports a different perspective of Western thought, entitled *The Eagle*:

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls (Tennyson, *Eagle*).

Using Suzuki's criteria of the Eastern way of thought in his example of Basho, and the poet's close inspection of nature, there is very little difference when looking at Tennyson's observation of the eagle. Tennyson does not state a desire to take the eagle in for closer inspection, in fact, he seems quite content watching this creature from afar, attempting to understand the bird in its natural state, as in the eagle falling like a thunderbolt. It must be said that Suzuki's statement of Western minds leaning towards observation is true, but it can easily be argued that this is just as true with Eastern minds - humans observe, and we try to understand what we observe by using

the languages we were culturally thrust into speaking. It is an intelligent comparison by Suzuki to choose Tennyson's *Flower in the Crannied Wall* against Basho's haiku, but Schaller may have been too quick to accept the comparison based on the subject material alone.

Looking at the structure of the two poems brings about another issue. There is a naturally occurring wordscape that differentiates a haiku poet and an English poet, at least in the mode Tennyson wrote in. This plays an important role in the comparison. If Basho's poetry called for more words to frame the experience, it might become an entirely different piece. Haiku is bound by severe limitations on the quantity of words, and this plays into the work of the poet who tries to create maximum effect from a minimal quantity of language. Haiku, unlike English poetry, is almost always concerned with the natural world.[7] In Basho's poem, it is impossible to say whether or not he acted beyond his close inspection. Was Basho's way of thinking really any different than Tennyson's when the English poet watched the eagle from afar? Tennyson could just as easily have said "one notices an eagle on a wall," but instead he says 'he watches from his mountain walls.'

It is not clear what Schaller ultimately thinks of the Eastern perspective from this section. He states that his quest for knowledge and the enjoyment of his studies stops him from adapting to Eastern ways of thinking. In the next section, it will become clear that Schaller did break through his trepidations in adapting, understanding, and perhaps even applying an Eastern perspective. It is necessary to analyze this section to gain a better understanding of Schaller's philosophical relationship to Matthiessen.

2.3 Matthiessen Through Schaller

Schaller also has a section in *Stones of Silence* about Crystal Mountain, simply titled: *Journey to Crystal Mountain*. This chapter in particular from the book should be required reading for anyone who has completed Matthiessen's text. It strengthens and differentiates ideas Matthiessen wrote about, and it is very clear that the two men collaborated a great deal in their thoughts and

[7] This is not to say that English poets did not often focus on nature, but as stated earlier, haiku is a specific form of poetry in Japanese culture, and Basho, who did much to elevate and popularize the form, almost always wrote about nature.

writing, more so than would appear from reading *The Snow Leopard*. Schaller includes a meditation passage from *The Snow Leopard* that will be analyzed further in the third chapter of this thesis, titled *A Meditation Place*. Schaller uses the passage to launch into a comparison of their journeys, and the "disparate reasons for being here" (Schaller, 243). Schaller states that Matthiessen is on an inner search, and that he himself is on a scientific quest, only to add that they are "travelers on similar paths". This is the moment in Schaller's text that he starts to process an Eastern perspective blending into his scientific way of thinking, which produces powerful realizations. Schaller admits that "the aims of Buddhism and science are in some aspects alike", before going on to quote Shunryu Suzuki from the *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* that Matthiessen loaned him, as referenced earlier. Suzuki's words that Schaller quotes are about enlightenment, and the study of ourselves: "when you understand a frog through and through, you attain enlightenment; you are Buddha… Without knowing the origin of things we cannot appreciate the results of our life's efforts… To study Buddhism is to study ourselves" (Suzuki, qtd. in Schaller, 243). Schaller, in a way, is doing exactly this in his journey, just like Matthiessen. Though Schaller, unlike Matthiessen, does not admit to how much he really attempted to understand Eastern thought, he does confront some of his long held beliefs about the superiority of scientific thought. Schaller follows the Suzuki quote by cracking open his rigid scientific grip on the world - this scientific grip exists through Schaller's words, and especially through the impression given by Matthiessen's words in *The Snow Leopard*. Schaller says that understanding a frog "transcends scientific perception" (243). To Schaller, as he opens his scientific vise to allow other thoughts to come in:

> science still remains a dream, for it takes us no more than a few faltering steps toward understanding; graphs and charts create little more than an illusion of knowledge. There is no ultimate knowing. Beyond the facts, beyond science, is a domain of cloud, the universe of the mind, ever expanding as the universe itself (243).

Even Schaller, with his fanatical and dedicated approach to nature through his scientific methods, admits science cannot hold all the answers. This adds another element to what he said earlier in *Stones of Silence* from the *Kang Chu* section, namely that, while he is resistant to adopting an Eastern perspective, he does find himself in that mode of thought through his

admission of the limitations of science. Schaller's admission that 'science still remains a dream' brings us to an interesting parallel in an article by SueEllen Campbell, from the 1988 summer issue of *Environmental Review*. The article is perfectly situated to weigh in on Schaller's difficulties with Eastern and Western perspectives, as the title of the article, *Science and Mysticism in the Himalayas: The Philosophical Journey of Peter Matthiessen and George Schaller* aptly describes. Campbell's beginning line of the article opens up another avenue of thought to this debate: "one of the enduring divisions in Western culture has been between the scientific and the spiritual visions of the natural world" (Campbell, 127). She then goes on to quote Ralph Waldo Emerson:[8]

> Empirical science is apt to cloud the sight, and… to bereave the student of manly contemplation of the whole. The savant becomes unpoetic. But the best read naturalist who lends an entire and devout attention to truth, will see that there remains much to learn of his relation to the world, and that it is… arrived at by untaught sallies of the spirit, by a continual self-recovery, and by entire humility. He will perceive that… a dream may let us deeper into the secret of nature than a hundred concerted experiments (Emerson, qtd. in Campbell, 127).

Emerson, when he speaks of a dream, is speaking of an actual dream, whether it be a reverie or dream while sleeping, which is different from Schaller speaking of science as a dream. Regardless of whether literal or figurative, Emerson's dream leads to perceptions of the secrets of nature, while Schaller claims that the dream of science provides nothing more than a constructed illusion of knowledge. Both admit that science either clouds the sight, or takes 'a few faltering steps towards understanding.' Schaller speaks of the limitations in graphs and charts, while Emerson denotes the shortcomings of 'a hundred concerted experiments.'

It is through Emerson that we can better achieve an understanding of the balance Schaller was seeking. Emerson, who wrote of "the wise silence, the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related, the eternal One" (Emerson, qtd. in Matthiessen, 226). This brings into relevance Schaller's compromise of choosing to become an ecologist, as ecologists are searching for a unity in nature between all living things. Schaller claims, from the earlier section

[8] American naturalist philosopher, poet, and essayist who was a leading component of the mid-19th century Transcendentalist movement.

in the *Stones of Silence*, though we find it evolving as the text continues, to have relinquished any harmony between Eastern and Western thought for himself, in favor of staying firmly entrenched in his scientific ways. Campbell gives us another way to conceive of Schaller's delineation of what the field biologist sees as incompatible binaries of Eastern and Western thought:

> two ways of seeing: through the cloudy sight of the empiricist, who 'freezes' the living subject 'under the wintry light of understanding,' and through the 'untaught' intuition of poets and dreamers. Although other writers have used different terms, this basic opposition has remained constant, marking the division set by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophical disputes between materialism and idealism. (Campbell, 127).

The division Campbell speaks of is the very same conflict that Schaller is grappling with on his journey with Matthiessen. Campbell further defines the divide, drawing in Emerson, and similar in thought to Schaller but different in words: "on one side is the empirical, the rational, the scientific - observing, measuring, dissecting, and classifying the visible world. On the other side of the spiritual, the poetic, the mystical - responding through imagination, intuition, or dreams to the invisible" (Campbell, 127). We find in Campbell and Emerson's thought a balance that Schaller claims he could not achieve, but as will be shown, Schaller does reach a middle ground between the opposite philosophical poles. This middle ground, for Campbell and Emerson, is represented by a dreaming poet, "combining 'sallies of the spirit' with the study of nature" (127). This, Campbell claims, is Emerson's ideal figure: "the scientific dreamer, the poetic scientist, the 'best read naturalist' (127). Following this context from Campbell and Emerson, the next section will present passages from Schaller's *Stones of Silence* and Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard*, to show how close they really are in their balancing between these two poles, according to their respective texts.

2.4 A Glimpse of Eternity

Schaller reaches a balance between Emerson's defined philosophical poles, though it is hard to find a direct first person claim of this in his writing. To understand how Schaller reaches a balance, we must turn directly towards his writing, in this case, from the *Journey to Crystal Mountain* section:

> Such vast wild spaces often produce fear; they seemingly threaten to crush and swallow a wanderer. But I know that mountains are not only wild, that we find in them what we seek, be it peace or violence, beauty or terror. Resting tranquilly near the bharal, I know also that animals are wild only because man has made them so. Wolf, snow leopard, and all other creatures could be as tame as these bharal if only we would permit them to be. However, before man can transcend the present, before he can view nature in this new dimension, he must first change himself (Schaller, 242).

Schaller writes of man imposing a wildness on animals. What he means exactly is not explicitly stated, but it could be in our anthropomorphic transpositions of animals, such as wolves. Once animals, such as wolves or even snow leopards, are conceived and inputted into our human culture, they take on new significations. As Zapf writes, "literature becomes a paradigmatic cultural form representing… the reflexive interactivity between mind and body, culture and nature" (Zapf, 161). But Schaller claims that we must change ourselves, which is the opposite of the idea encountered in Tennyson's poem about the *Daphne*, when Tennyson claims that if he could know what the flower was - 'root and all' - then he could 'know what God and man is.' Schaller is in effect shifting his scientific view to incorporate the Eastern way of thinking he was so adamant about not being able to adopt. The following longer passage further cements Schaller's way of thinking as being in tune with Eastern philosophy, as well as being closer in line to what Matthiessen wrote about in *The Snow Leopard*:

> Sometimes, while watching bharal, my eyes unconsciously leave the animals to climb along the skyline, and my mind struggles to escape its confines, traveling, searching, seeking, until on rare occasions a brief vision of shining clarity seems to define the world. Once I climbed high on a ridge where all was space and light and wind careened up the canyon over the weathered slopes. In fading shafts of sunlight the monotone of rock and snow had a metallic sheen, as from an inner glow. Looking down into the valley, I at first

> saw only the past, a fragment of a lifeless star. It was no more inviting than the earth as seen from outer space, hurtling through blackness, featureless, swathed in filaments of cloud. Then I detected the monastery, a fossilized remnant from another age. This ephemeral bulge on the earth's crust transformed the landscape. The view became liberating; it provides a glimpse of eternity. The compulsion to study bharal vanished. I knew my efforts were of little consequence, that this species, like all others, represents a mere passing phase of life in an ever-changing world. Man has pondered the transience of existence since he has become man, yet such reflections recur in high and lonely places (Schaller, 243-4).

Besides the obvious poetic power of this passage, Schaller here achieves what Suzuki claimed Basho and other Eastern poets achieve, and that Suzuki claims Western poets and scientists cannot achieve: a simple observance of nature, coupled with a dissolution of the scientific need to classify everything under an analytical guise. When Schaller obtains his liberating 'glimpse of eternity,' he reaches the point where the entire purpose of the journey evaporates: 'the compulsion to study bharal vanished.' Schaller is confronted by the ephemerality of his bharal observing existence, the ecologist's *raison d'être*, and understands that this is merely a phase of biological being. Unfortunately, for scholars seeking examples of scientists merging with ephemeral and spiritual realizations, Schaller quickly moves back to his scientific mode of thought:

> However, I let such thoughts slide away with the wind. Introspection may help me be less of a stranger to myself, but it accomplishes little. I have an inner obligation to remain a part of the present, to observe bharal, to discover something new; I am delighted with each new insight, even if utterly trivial in the grand scheme of things. The day I first saw rump-rubbing was cause for special elation: one bharal male walked up to a second male and for nearly a minute rubbed his face on the other's rump (Schaller, 244)

In this passage, it concludes the self-reflection section of the *Journey to Crystal Mountain* for Schaller, and afterwards, he returns to his ecologist and anthropologist descriptions without a second look at the possible implications of what he had thought and written. For the purpose of understanding how Schaller has similar glimpses to Matthiessen, there are two sentences from

the passage in particular to look at. Schaller claims that introspection helps him to ‘be less of a stranger’ to himself, and that every novel insight brings him delight. In both cases, these accomplishments bring about nothing, according to Schaller; nothing ‘in the grand scheme of things.’ Schaller is fighting against a deeper intuition. He says that these moments accomplish little, and that they are ‘utterly trivial,’ but if he becomes less of a stranger to himself, how can he claim, as a scientist, that the observation and awareness of these insights achieves nothing? One line of thought that Schaller is not explicitly saying can be understood when he talks about his 'inner obligation to remain part of the present.’ Schaller cannot - or is afraid to - open up to a different way of thinking, whether classified as Eastern or other. The inner obligation he speaks of is the duty he puts on himself for his ecological work as a field biologist. Looking at his words, particularly the *inner* part of his obligations, then we find the contradiction that sits with Schaller throughout his expeditions. Schaller is arguing, or claiming, that the personal insights he receives are not translatable to his audience, in other words, they are not relevant to the field work he assumes others are expecting to read - they have no place in a field biologist’s text. This is contradictory to the fact that he does document these insights. If they truly accomplished nothing, and were worthless in ‘the grand scheme of things,’ then his duty as the scientist he claims he is would be considered compromised by their inclusion in his work. Schaller’s choice to become an ecologist, and the compromise of it by seeking to find unity and harmony in all of nature, necessarily include his thoughts as part of that unity and harmony. Schaller is the scientist who wrote *Stones of Silence*, so he cannot be untethered from his authorial role of creating the text, but at the same time, he cannot be the sole proprietor of his field work. His field work relies on observing not only flora and fauna, but incorporating ethnographic and anthropological observations and insights into his documentations. This being true, statements like “seeking, until on rare occasions a brief vision of shining clarity seems to define the world” (Schaller, 243) are not worthless, they are equally a part of Schaller’s responsibility as an ecologist as statements like “one bharal male walked up to a second male and for nearly a minute rubbed his face on the other’s rump. I soon noted that it is usually a lower-ranking animal who rubs, apparently to convey his submission and to express friendliness” (244). Both passages are necessary to the work Schaller is doing, and while a field biologist is expected to place the highest importance on

the task of observing, classifying and understanding for the reader, there is an equal duty to include thoughts that bridge the gap between objective knowing and subjective perceiving: "how differently the poet and the naturalist look at objects!" (Thoreau, qtd. in Campbell, 127).

This gap, however it can be classified, is not a new current of thought, and it is one of the fundamental differences and points of collaboration for both Schaller and Matthiessen. Campbell quotes Aldous Huxley in a line that draws in Schaller to perspectives he purposely evades when wading in too deep: "elementary ecology leads straight to elementary Buddhism" (Huxley, qtd. in Campbell, 140). Campbell corrals both Schaller and Matthiessen into what she calls a "developing philosophical consciousness" (Schaller, 140), or what is more widely known as "deep ecology".[9] What Schaller claims he cannot do - though the argument remains that the text of *Stones of Silence* itself contradicts his claim - is to bridge the gap, or balance between two philosophical poles that are not, in fact, disparate. Put a different way, Roderick Nash states these poles are an *intellectual collision*:

> The gospel of ecology itself can be seen as an intellectual collision between scientific and what might be called *theological* ecology. The logic of the scientist was fused to the intuition of the poet; Western analysis to Eastern mysticism. The result was a holistic sense of oneness, of community, that could stand the test of both fact and feeling (Nash, qtd. in Campbell, 140).

Schaller is so dogmatically motivated by scientifically driven agendas, that anytime he approaches his understanding through feeling, he reflects on the implications, then continually dismisses such inclusions as irrelevant to the aim or scope of his inquiries, which is a mistake. Campbell then pulls a quote from *Deep Ecology: Living As If Nature Mattered*:

> This is the work we call cultivating ecological consciousness. This process involves becoming more aware of the actuality of rocks, wolves, trees, and rivers - the cultivation of the insight that everything is connected. Cultivating ecological consciousness is a process of learning to appreciate silence and solitude and rediscovering how to listen. It is

[9] Deep Ecology was founded by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, in 1972. Naess called for a revolution in our modern conditioned response to nature, arguing that an affirmation of our true understanding of life should involve an ecological perspective perceiving "the complex interdependence of living things" (Clark, 23). Naess believed in a "greater self" through deep ecology, which is easily synthesized with Buddhist thought.

> learning how to be more receptive, trusting, holistic in perception, and is grounded in a vision of nonexploitative science and technology (Devall and Sessions, qtd. in Campbell, 140).

It is not difficult for an ecologist such as Schaller to understand that 'everything is connected,' but in the solitude and silence that he and Matthiessen encounter for long stretches on their journey, Schaller is guilty of resisting the call to rediscover how to listen. In passages already used in this chapter, it is clear that Schaller feels the call, and he documents what happens when he rises above simple observations of the natural objects he encounters, but his rediscovery of this interior intuition always comes up against the immovable object which is his scientific ego. This scientific ego, according to Matthiessen's words, create a sense of insecurity in Schaller:

> This morning, expressing his relief that such good bharal data have come in, GS refers again to his dread of failure, of the satisfaction that his peers might take in his first mistake, and after two months I feel I know him well enough to point out how often this refrain occurs in his conversation, and how baseless his apprehension seems to be: no matter how badly he might fail on any expedition, his abilities and good reputation are beyond dispute. GS recognizes his mild paranoia, and discusses it quite frankly as he stands there, observing the blue sheep's world through his faithful spotting scope; he is more open and relaxed each day (Matthiessen, 752).

In *Stones of Silence*, Schaller exhibits a major reluctance to admit to his audience, particularly after his more spiritual and unscientific passages, that there is value in what he discusses outside of the scientific scope. After reading Matthiessen's passage from *The Snow Leopard* about Schaller's fear of failure, it would be tempting to think that Schaller faces internal insecurities around assumptions that anything he includes outside of the data, the bharal data in particular, would be seen by his colleagues as irrelevant, or even more extreme, as failure. Nevertheless, Schaller includes moments in his text that are meditative and detached from his primary data pursuit: "every so often I discard my cameras, tripod, scope, and other equipment, as well as my routine, and wander the hills unencumbered. At such times I must train myself to see again, to respond to creatures other than bharal" (Schaller, 262). Whether it is definitive or not that Schaller neglects an explicit acceptance of Eastern ways of thinking, or of his spiritual passages,

he leaves evidence throughout that he is a man who attempts to puncture the reality of nature to a deeper understanding, with an awareness that is transmissible to readers of his text.

The legacy and scope of Schaller's book contains much more value than a strictly scientific presentation and analysis of his data. It possesses literary qualities that Zapf states "consists in defamiliarizing the familiar and breaking up closed systems of thought into living textual energy-flows" (Zapf, 71). Schaller's closed scientific system of thought is broken up by Matthiessen's companionship, intellectually and spiritually, and it is the reason the two men's collaboration is so crucial to the value of Schaller's work, and vice versa - value beyond what both of them claim as the driving force behind their journeys. Campbell is correct when she states that "Matthiessen and Schaller journey together through this process, each learning from the skills and intuitions of the other" (Campbell, 240).

2.5 A Resolution Between Science and Spirit

To bridge the gap between Matthiessen and Schaller's thought processes, a comparison on one subject that the two men are equally drawn to will garner more insights, and the subject is the snow leopard. In this comparison, Schaller writes about the snow leopard with radiating thoughts including Eastern ways of thinking. Matthiessen's descriptions will follow, to further elucidate the blurred spectrum between the polarities of thought. Schaller, whether he explicitly admits it or not, hopes to find what Campbell calls "a balance between science and imagination" (Campbell, 128). Matthiessen, by contrast, is more open to a shift on the imaginative-scientific pole. Schaller included passages in *Stones of Silence* that are steeped in imaginary writing, but it is his unwillingness in the text itself to admit to it that holds him back from achieving something closer to what Matthiessen did in *The Snow Leopard.* Campbell claims that both men reach a resolution in their works, specifically towards this imaginative-scientific axis: "a subtle and distinctly contemporary resolution" (Campbell, 128). All literary works, whether fiction or nonfiction, necessarily reach a resolution of some kind by the fact that a text has to have a completion point where the last period is drawn, but it is difficult to say whether Schaller truly reaches a balance:

> When they tell their stories, both men suppress this shared interest and emphasize their differences. Both books lay out what seems to be a simple embodiment of the conflict between science and spirit: Schaller is the empiricist, Matthiessen the mystic. While on one level this simplification merely emphasizes the actual contrast between the two, it is more importantly a conscious literary device that allows them to dramatize the traditional conflict and the way each of them slowly works towards its resolution (Campbell, 128).

Matthiessen willingly opens up an internal dialogue in *The Snow Leopard* that welcomes the certainty of a scientific approach, and also the uncertainty of what Campbell calls the *mystic* approach, and the resultant encounters and interplay between science and the spirit - Matthiessen is more comfortable in a state of unknowing. Matthiessen, through his Buddhist explorations, welcomes the futility of ultimately knowing anything. Schaller, by contrast, seems frightened by that prospect. Matthiessen faces his ego to understand it better, and to understand how to potentially transcend it as best he can. Schaller is driven by his scientific ego, and when his ego faces uncertainty and intuitions from the shadow sources of his interior, he flees the confrontation ground. Here is a key passage relating to the actual snow leopard, from Schaller's *Journey to Crystal Mountain*:

> Of the many mountain spirits at Shey, I seek to meet only one - the snow leopard. Peter and I had found an old dropping but not until the morning of November 12, the day after Tukten and Gyaltsen returned, is there a fresh track in the dust of the trail. We peruse the slopes carefully, knowing the cat is there, perhaps watching us with clear, unblinking eyes, but only a golden eagle quarters the cliffs. Again that night the snow leopard patrols the slopes in search of unwary bharal. Near the hermitage trail is a shallow cave, and at it's entrance I pile rocks into a low wall behind which I unroll my sleeping bag. Perhaps the snow leopard will pass my hiding place at dusk or dawn...The cave's ceiling presses close, and in the dim light I can see in it scalloped shells, fragments of bryophytes, and calcareous tubes, probably the former retreats of marine worms. I lie among fossilized creatures of the ancient Tethys Sea, where long before man, waves pounded and life pulsated in the abysmal depths. If I close my right eye, there is only rock; I lie buried beneath the sediments of the ocean floor, and perhaps my skull will become a *salegrami*

> stone. If I close the left eye, my gaze is liberated, penetrating the emptiness beyond the first evening stars.
>
> The snow leopard crossed the slope just above my cave sometime during the night and joined the trail 150 feet beyond the trip wire. All that day and the next I look for its shadow among clefts and behind junipers. But spirits made of dreams and their appearance cannot be willed… After four days the snow leopard vanishes from Shey, without having caught a bharal. Scavenger birds would have told me of a kill (Schaller, 252-53).

Schaller weaves the scientific and the spiritual in this passage, as well as the poetic. The first line foregrounds Schaller's willingness in his descriptive prose to knit some form of spirituality in - he calls the snow leopard a spirit. This sentence in purely scientific terms would be absolutely meaningless, yet Schaller must have been aware of what he was doing. He then describes the reality of their snow leopard pursuit, through the observation of an old dropping and a fresh track. They know the snow leopard is there, somewhere, potentially seeing the two men, yet only offering traces of its presence, while tantalizing them with its visual absence. Schaller then, unrelated to the snow leopard, gives another description. The cave the men are sleeping in gives the backdrop to Schaller's poetic time slip, triggered by his actual visions of 'scalloped shells, fragments of bryophytes, and calcareous tubes.' He is literally lying amongst fossilized remnants of creatures that used to dwell in the ancient Tethys Sea, a place where 'waves pounded and life pulsated in the abysmal depths.' Schaller then takes the reader into a dream-like sequence: he closes his right eye, altering his perception by initiating the absence of his left eye. This has the effect of giving him sight of only rock, creating the sense that he is buried, underneath the Tethys Sea, pondering what might become of his skull, that it may 'perhaps… become a *salegrami* stone,' which would mean Schaller himself would become a fossilized creature. This brings to mind the realization that he, like the bharal, or like the ancient creatures, is a transient species of life, one that: "like all others, represents a mere passing phase of life in an ever-changing world" (Schaller, 243). Schaller then closes his left eye, receiving a liberation of the senses, "penetrating the emptiness beyond the first evening stars" (Schaller, 252). Whether or not Schaller's right eye has opened back up is unclear, but he documents the first evening stars as being visible, so the

assumption is that he has opened up his right eye. If both eyes were closed, however, his vision would be equally real, still able to reach a liberation. Whether eyes are open or closed, there is a visual field wholly present, and the light our eyes receive when closed can also recall *an emptiness beyond the first evening stars.*

The end of the passage contains one of the most important lines for understanding how Schaller incorporates the spiritual into his personal ecologist's *modus operandi*: 'but spirits made of dreams and their appearance cannot be willed.' The two men's long journey with the hopes of spotting the snow leopard was not a success based on literal seeing, but this result holds different meanings for both men. What is important to understand, before returning to Matthiessen, is that Schaller realized something deeper about spirituality - and the text says as much. His admission that the snow leopard was the only spirit he wanted to see, and that spirits made of dreams, and the will of man to conjure that spirit into appearance, is a veering into mysticism. It is also an example of Buddhist thought, the acceptance of what is, rather than what is desired. Schaller is fusing fact and feeling, as in Nash's *theological ecology*; there is no scientist that can prove or disprove with absolute certainty Schaller's statement about spirits, dreams, and appearances. The inclusion of this passage is proof that Schaller merges with the spiritual on his journey with Matthiessen. Campbell writes: "at Crystal Mountain Schaller becomes a kind of mystic and Matthiessen a kind of scientist, and both experience moments of transcendence through their observations of nature" (Campbell, 134).

The final paragraph of Schaller's book, which is also the conclusion of the *Journey to Crystal Mountain* chapter, illuminates how profoundly his journey alongside Matthiessen blurred his previously binary relationship between science and spirituality, between Eastern and Western thought or, as Campbell so often claims: mysticism. In the passage, Schaller discusses dreams and desires, reincarnations, and the image of Drutob Senge Yeshe flying eternally on a 'magic snow lion':[10]

[10] Yeshe, as defined by Schaller, was a Buddhist ascetic who attained enlightenment at Dolpo. After attaining enlightenment, Yeshe used 'a flying snow lion' to vanquish the people of Dolpo's 'wild mountain spirit' that was previously their supreme god. This transformed Yeshe into a 'thundering mountain of puring crystal', giving Crystal Mountain its name (Schaller, 248).

> Already within me Shey remains only a strange combination of memory, dream, and desire. I know that all things in nature are transient, that species vanish and mountains dissolve, yet I hope that nothing will change at Shey, that from reincarnation to reincarnation the lama will still occupy his ochre-colored eyrie, that the medieval silence will continue to be broken by the clashing horns of the fighting bharal, and that Drutob Senge Yeshe will fly forever on his magic snow lion around the sacred Crystal Mountain (Schaller, 277).

Schaller concludes his book with the admission that 'a strange combination' remains in him. The combination is not composed of scientific elements that contribute a better understanding of the data that he so obsessively sought, but a mixture of spiritual components. He marries his ecologist perspective with the spiritual when he includes the idea of transience in nature, which is the major lynchpin that drove one of his more intense veerings from the scientific in a previously cited passage in this chapter. The impetus of Schaller's journey and book, at the start, was steadfastly dedicated to his scientific pursuits, as well as to a sense of duty towards creating awareness, and hopefully action for the rapid decline in the disappearing species of the Himalayan region: "the fact that a living being can vanish from this earth solely because of man's improvidence and neglect is appalling, and the utter finality of it touches the consciousness of far too few" (Schaller, 7). Schaller, as an ecologist who already understood the degradation of the Himalayan region on a previous journey, felt tremendous anguish at the inevitable decline of the wildlife he encountered and studied. There is not a single passage from Schaller's introduction chapter, *Path To The Mountains*, that could be considered spiritual, which illustrates the starting point of his thoughts on the Eastern-Western spectrum. He admits, though, that "any scientific endeavor needs focal points beyond the desire to gather knowledge, and the Asian sheep and goats present fascinating biological problems" (Schaller, 7). His focal points beyond knowledge gathering, however, are still strictly grounded in objective observations of wildlife. At the beginning of the journey, Schaller's purpose was focused on his power as a scientist and writer: "pen and camera are weapons against oblivion, they can create an awareness for that which may soon be lost forever, and if this book has a main purpose, it is to induce others to care for the dying mountain world of the Himalaya" (Schaller, 7). At the end of

his journey, through the collaboration with Matthiessen, he ends up attaining a different kind of understanding of the consciousnesses available to humans. Perhaps the development and progression of Schaller's consciousness on his journey with Matthiessen is best encapsulated in the indelible image of a flying Buddhist ascetic that concludes his text.

2.6 I Shall Not See It Because I Am Not Ready

Matthiessen employs different literary techniques, as well as philosophical perspectives in *The Snow Leopard*, as compared to Schaller's *Stones of Silence*. This section, pulling out passages from Matthiessen's *At Crystal Mountain* section, when both men are equally as entranced by the pursuit of seeing the snow leopard in the flesh, will elucidate on these differences. It will also illuminate Matthiessen's unique perceptions, and strengthen an understanding of how he filters his experiences through the lens of Zen Buddhism.

Matthiessen prefaces *The Way Home* section of *The Snow Leopard*, which follows the *At Crystal Mountain* section, with an epigraph by Dogen Zenji. It deserves inclusion before analyzing his snow leopard passages from the *Crystal Mountain* section, because *The Way Home* section holds less relevant examples of the snow leopard for this analysis, yet the epigraph creates a foundation to understand Matthiessen's perspective. Zenji says: "do not be amazed by the true dragon" (epigraph, *The Way Home*). The implications for this epigraph will become clearer after Matthiessen's passages are included, but to preface the coming analysis, Zenji's quote can be understood as a call to be neutral in the presence, or even more importantly, in the absence of seeing 'the true dragon.' To 'not be amazed by the true dragon,' is to not be amazed by the actual snow leopard. From Schaller's passages, it is known that the men did not see the snow leopard at Crystal Mountain together. Matthiessen included this epigraph after the men had 'failed' to see the snow leopard in the flesh, placing it before *The Way Home* section. Matthiessen is using Zenji's quote to say that seeing or not seeing the snow leopard is not a cause for amazement, that the result that presents itself is the same either way. Zapf claims that this "continuously displaces presence into absence, and translates absence into imaginary presence in a holistic conception of life that is the ecocultural domain of art" (Zapf, 239). The absence of the

actual vision of the snow leopard in Matthiessen's text does not deter him from creating a rich 'imaginary presence' throughout, and most notably in the *At Crystal Mountain* passage.

As the men begin to track the snow leopard: "on this bright morning, under the old moon, leopard prints are fresh as petals on the trail" (Matthiessen, 728), it becomes clear how singular their attention becomes - Schaller away from his bharal, and Matthiessen away from his inner spiritual pursuits. Matthiessen however, in comparison to Schaller, is able to fuse his turn towards tracking the snow leopard with his inner spiritual explorations, whereas Schaller loses sight of his primary goal of bharal data in his borderline obsessive pursuit of the snow leopard:

> From Tsakang comes the weird thump of a damaru, or prayer drum, sometimes constructed of two human skulls; this instrument and the kangling trumpet, carved from the human thigh bone, are used in Tantrism to deepen meditation, not through the encouragement of morbid thoughts but as reminders that our time on earth is fleeting. Or perhaps this is the hollow echo of the cavern water, dripping down into the copper canister; I cannot be sure. But the extraordinary sound brings the wild landscape to attention: somewhere on this mountainside the leopard listens (Matthiessen, 728-29).

The resonating of the damaru prayer drum from Tsakang gives Matthiessen a chance to speak of the common 'our time on earth is fleeting' idea that Schaller himself reckoned with at the end of *Stones of Silence*. What the drum does is 'bring the wild landscape to attention,' it focuses Matthiessen's mind - and Schaller's - in a singular way on the snow leopard. Matthiessen goes on to describe this singularity in fuller detail:

> GS has crossed the river early to look for more fresh sign: he tries not to let the leopard interfere with his study of blue sheep, but the great cats have a strong hold on him, and the snow leopard is the least known of them all. It is wonderful how the presence of this creature draws the whole landscape to a point, from the glint of light on the old horns of a sheep to the ring of a pebble on the frozen ground (Matthiessen, 741).

The singularity of the effect of the snow leopard's presence on the men is so powerful, that Matthiessen feels the entire landscape is pulled into a tension-filled unity reflected on the 'old horns of a sheep,' and the auditory sound wave of an inanimate 'pebble on the frozen ground.' Matthiessen has many functions as a writer, and these passages in which he describes the power

of the snow leopard are examples of the poet informing the scientist on how to understand what is being seen. It is important to consider that Matthiessen is also projecting his anthropomorphic observations onto the landscape, which causes an overemphasis of projection onto everything from his particular observational lens in the pursuit of the snow leopard. The snow leopard's absence makes it easier to project its presence onto the landscape Matthiessen is encountering. If the snow leopard were a less elusive creature, the glint of light from the horns may merely be a reflection in the snow leopard's eyes, if Matthiessen was afforded time to observe the snow leopard as he did the other wildlife. The elusivity and absence, however, is projecting Matthiessen's attention outward to make sense of what he is seeing through the focus on the cat, but he does not mention how the pebbles are equally as contributing to the landscape's singularity pole. Why does Matthiessen place such an importance on the snow leopard? Much of it is a scarcity effect, and a binary of "the tension between shadow and light" (Bishop, 211), a tension between the absence and presence of the search. Matthiessen invokes the same emphasis on another predator in the landscape: "moving away without haste up an open slope beyond the rise, the wolves bring the barren hills to life" (Matthiessen, 593). The wolves are present, as compared to the flickering absence and presence of the snow leopard, yet they gather the same singularity effect Matthiessen projects onto the snow leopard. As Zapf claims, "storytelling and fictionalizing open up possible, alternative worlds in which what remains ungraspable and unrealized in a historically given individual or collective reality can be symbolically articulated and integrated into the ecology of cultural discourse" (230). The snow leopard, for Matthiessen, was an 'ungraspable and unrealized' entity, but through the circulation of *The Snow Leopard* text, the absence and periphery presence of the great cat produced a greater awareness of the animal in the literal sense, by the book's reception and cultural reproduction, and in a metaphorical and figurative sense, by Matthiessen's literary tracking and tracing of the snow leopard. The metaphorical and figurative underpinnings in the *At Crystal Mountain* section create a "continuous cultural self-renewal by turning these systemic absences into linguistic and communicational presences" (Zapf, 230). Zapf opens up 'systemic absences' to incorporate a large swath of cultural agencies such as "cultural memory, ethics, and energy", but in

Matthiessen's case, it is the more-than-human world embedded within the local nature he encounters that turns the snow leopard's absence into a 'communicational presence.'

Matthiessen's abilities as a writer, which offer thought-provoking vantage points like this singularity effect, do conflict with his Zen Buddhist practices at times of understanding everything in unity. He places such an importance on perceiving the snow leopard with his own eyes, that he devalues other objects in the landscape by sacrificing their presence to an overvaluing of the snow leopard's presence. It is a difficult notion to ascertain whether the snow leopard has a stronger pull on the landscape simply because it is the alpha predator, or because Matthiessen is projecting his inner desire to witness the cat onto the landscape that he becomes familiar with. As Bishop notes: "the outer and inner worlds trigger off mutual resonances which echo back and forth" (Bishop, 213). Matthiessen, shortly before the two men realize their quest may end without seeing the animal, writes: "the snow leopard is a strong presence; its vertical pupils and small stilled breaths are no more than a snow cock's glide away" (Matthiessen, 730). Again, the presence of the snow leopard weighs on Matthiessen, and again he uses other objects to situate his relationship to the cat. He is projecting its image onto the page, by invoking its physiological components, wholly present in his mind and description, but wholly absent in actual form in front of him. Matthiessen's Buddhist thoughts inform his relation in the quest to see the snow leopard in very different ways from Schaller's, in Eastern ways that, according to this thesis, are arguably more valuable. Schaller was singularly focused on catching a glimpse of the cat from his scientific mode of searching, but there is scant evidence in *Stones of Silence* of the relational situating of the snow leopard to other objects of the landscape, as Matthiessen provides. Matthiessen overemphasizes the snow leopard's effect on the landscape in ways, but by doing so, he manifests his projection into the reality that he is himself seeking to create. Whether or not 'the glint of light on the old horns of a sheep' holds any objective relation to the snow leopard outside of Matthiessen's projection is irrelevant, because he creates for himself, and the reader: "[T]he power of literature is that in describing the world it creates what it describes… You are describing a world and by describing it you are creating it" (Stevens, qtd. in Bennett and Royle, 495). Bennett and Royle are quoting Wallace Stevens, and the line helps to situate Matthiessen's authorial power as it relates to the reader and the landscape. At first, the

landscape holds all the power, as Matthiessen and Schaller are unfamiliar with the terrain. That power shifts in two ways, however: once Matthiessen and Schaller reach the Crystal Mountain, they become embedded in the landscape, as their encounter moves from that of a stranger, to that of a familiar observer as their time there stretches; second, as Matthiessen creates the landscape in the text of *The Snow Leopard*, he takes the power the landscape has over him, and inverts that by infusing the text with the power of his interpretation. This causes the world he is describing to collide with his own interpolating creation. Thus, it is impossible to define the actual singularity effect of the snow leopard on the landscape, as the snow leopard's presence and power becomes distorted - with poetic grace and lush descriptive observations - through the lens of Matthiessen's textual inversion of his relationship to the world at Crystal Mountain: "literature is not frivolous pseudo-statements but takes its place among the acts of language that transform the world, bringing into being the things that they name" (Culler, 96). Culler, and earlier Stevens, are discussing the implications of the performative act as a strand of theory related to literature, and the examples they used in their works are quoting poetry and fiction. It is clear, however, that performative theory is applicable to nonfiction, and provides a framework to understand the resonance of how Matthiessen situates his relationship to the snow leopard. Indeed, the very title of Matthiessen's book shapes the readers' understanding of what they expect to encounter in the text, as "a title is always a promise" (Derrida, qtd. in Bennett and Royle, 313).

2.7 Spared the Desolation of Success

As the men moved closer to the realization that they may not see the snow leopard, there was a shift in Schaller's attitude towards the pursuit. In a way, Schaller took on Matthiessen's Buddhist approach - he began to let go of the goal, and opened up to the possibility of not seeing, of non-encountering:

> GS murmurs, 'Unless it moves, we are not going to see it, not even on the snow—these creatures are really something.' With our binoculars, we study the barren ridge face, foot by foot. Then he says, 'You know something? We've seen so much, maybe it's better if there are some things that we don't see.' He seems startled by his own remark, and I

> wonder if he means this as I take it—that we have been spared the desolation of success, the doubt: is this really what we came so far to see? (Matthiessen, 730-31).

Matthiessen writes that Schaller is almost startled by the comments he made. It is a possible admission of victory in defeat, to which Matthiessen includes the memorable line: 'spared the desolation of success.' This line calls to mind the epigraph of non-amazement at the sight of the true dragon, or for the men, the snow leopard. It does not, however, fully explain why success, in the pursuit of the snow leopard, would be a desolate affair. Matthiessen includes a line that vaguely hints at a different kind of success in the non-encountering of the snow leopard: "have you seen the snow leopard? No! Isn't that wonderful?" (Matthiessen, 738), but he never fully resolves the desolation of success line. Instead, he comes to accept potential reasons why he did not see the snow leopard, but because the snow leopard possessed both men's consciousness at Crystal Mountain, there is a projection by Matthiessen which he uses to accept a failure to witness the cat. This means that the desolation of success would potentially be no better than the actuality of seeing. He has resolved his thoughts to allow the wonder of non-seeing, as Schaller also projects a rationalization on their non-seeing of the snow leopard. In Schaller's case, it is an inversion of a tale from *Aesop's Fables*, and the example of the fox and the grapes, which is considered a display of cognitive dissonance. In the tale, written in different ways as the story has taken on modifications through history, a fox finds a bunch of grapes hanging from a tree. The fox is then taken by desire, and attempts to reach the grapes in order to eat them. After a few attempts, the fox realizes the grapes cannot be reached, and turns a cold shoulder to the fruit, rationalizing his failed attempt by rejecting his original desire, claiming to itself that the grapes were not worth eating in the first place (Library of Congress, http://read.gov/aesop/005.html). The tale is an obvious example of anthropomorphizing the fox with a human projection on behavioral rationalization, but it serves to illustrate a very real behavior that humans make. The key difference is that the men were driven by the desire without actually seeing the snow leopard, and after having not seen the cat, they provide an inversion to Aesop's tale: that they did possess the desire to see the cat, but that it is potentially better to have *not* seen the snow leopard. This rationalization is not inherently any different than the fox's, because it is a rationalization

that is not grounded in any fact, but derives from a subjective reflection in relation to a failed attempt.

In the final passages related to the men's pursuit of the snow leopard, the similarities and differences between the two men become apparent. The passages dovetail with the idea that Matthiessen's encounters with Eastern ways of thought affect his relation to the snow leopard, and Matthiessen's relation to his thought from his meditation practices also affected Schaller, as documented in *Stones of Silence*. In the *Aesop's Fable* tale with the fox and the grapes, it illustrated a very primal way of being with the world. We see something in nature that we desire, or we know of something that exists, and we are drawn to our desire to pursue it and witness its being. If we cannot attain our desire, our basic instinct is to shield our ego from the encountering of failure by rationalizing a different interpretation of the outcome, thereby distorting the failure into a cognitive dissonant reaction. Matthiessen rises above this basic tendency through his meditation practice, and his study of Eastern thought:

> In the longing that starts one on the path is a kind of homesickness, and some way, on this journey, I have started home. Homegoing is the purpose of my practice, of my mountain meditation and my daybreak chanting, of my koan: All the peaks are covered with snow—why is this one bare? To resolve that illogical question would mean to burst apart, let fall all preconceptions and supports. But I am not ready to let go, and so I shall not resolve my koan, or see the snow leopard, that is to say, perceive it. I shall not see it because I am not ready (Matthiessen, 770-71).

Matthiessen, though avoiding the rationalization that afflicted the fox in *Aesop's Fable*, does rationalize the experience of not seeing the snow leopard. It is a rationalization that comes from Eastern thought, however, because he attempts to transcend his ego by admitting a fault in his behavior - the unwillingness to let go. This realization denies Matthiessen the opportunity to perceive the snow leopard, though both men perceived traces of the cat in the mountains. Finally, Matthiessen simply admits that he was not ready.

The koan that Matthiessen received was given to him by Eido Roshi, whose relationship is never clearly defined in *The Snow Leopard*, but it is a relationship significant enough to include in Matthiessen's dedications prefacing the book. The koan was coupled with a task for

Matthiessen: "he instructed me to recite the Kannon Sutra as I walked among the mountains, and gave me a koan … : 'All the peaks are covered with snow—why is this one bare?'" (Matthiessen, 416). A koan is necessarily concise, and simultaneously a profundity coupled with a banality. To understand the koan better, Roshi told Matthiessen that "perhaps what such whispers anticipated was a spiritual 'great death' and a rebirth. 'The snow,' he murmured, 'may signify extinction, and renewal.' After a pause, he warned me, 'Expect nothing' (Matthiessen, 416). Matthiessen does not give the element of snow itself much treatment in *The Snow Leopard*. It is primarily used as a cursory addition to the scenery. The koan, coupled with Roshi's interpretation of what snow signifies, informs Matthiessen's encounters on his journey, though it leaves the reader wanting more in relation to the subject-object relationship of Matthiessen and snow.

It is necessary to add another passage contextualizing what a koan is, and how Matthiessen received his own personal koan. A koan, according to Matthiessen, is "a Zen paradox, not to be solved by intellect, that may bring about a sudden dissolution of logical thought and clear the way for direct seeing into the heart of existence" (Matthiessen, 415-16). This is one of the clearest definitions of what Matthiessen's companion, Schaller, could not let go of: 'a sudden dissolution of logical thought.' Schaller, in passages already included, does in fact reach the 'direct seeing into the heart of existence,' but the difference is that he is unwilling to admit it. Matthiessen, by contrast, strives for this clarity throughout *The Snow Leopard*. In a way he achieves the clarity he sought, but the cost of reaching 'direct seeing' is the men's failure to see the snow leopard. A question remains: had Matthiessen and Schaller seen the snow leopard, how would Matthiessen have conceptualized the experience? Would it also have led him to the 'heart of existence?' The answer to this question is only possible to answer with theory, but Matthiessen gives the reader an insight on what he did receive at Crystal Mountain: "if the snow leopard should leap from the rock above and manifest itself before me—S-A-A-O!—then in that moment of pure fright, out of my wits, I might truly perceive it, and be free" (Matthiessen, 771). Matthiessen speaks of true perception that leads to freedom - a freedom that is borne from letting go of something: letting go of what was his one true desire on the journey that was a possibility of manifestation: seeing the snow leopard. Most of Matthiessen's other hopes related

to his meditation practice, and gaining a better understanding of Buddhism, but his real freedom was imprisoned in his desire to see the snow leopard. Matthiessen reckons with this idea of true freedom in the middle of the final section of *The Snow Leopard*, the *The Way Home* section:

> Perhaps I left too soon; perhaps a great chance has been wasted; had I stayed at Shey until December, the snow leopard might have shown itself at last. These doubts fill me with despair. In worrying about the future, I despoil the present; in my escape, I leave a true freedom behind (Matthiessen, 856).

Due to the oncoming winter potentially affecting snow passes on the return home, Matthiessen relinquished the chance to stay on at Crystal Mountain, and by doing so, added time to see the snow leopard. His doubt filled his journey home, and his self-awareness through Buddhism and meditation gives him the insight that the perpetual present he is seeking through his practice of Zen has been spoiled, and by doing so, he leaves his 'true freedom behind.' As Bishop claims, Matthiessen's failure "takes a certain courage to document a confused return after such an ecstatic build-up. It is a far more human and wiser Matthiessen who returns" (Bishop, 215). This failure that Matthiessen is haunted by is not the failure of the non-seeing of the snow leopard, but the failure of un-docking himself in the present, because his time at Crystal Mountain had already passed, and by ruminating on the past or the present is to sacrifice what Matthiessen was living through. Matthiessen's melancholic conclusion does not resonate the effect his text has had on a continuous expansion of readers through each generation, or as Zapf puts it, "literary texts provide a sustainable matrix for an ongoing process of ecocultural communication, criticism, and self-renewal, which can potentially be shared by a worldwide literary community and can thereby help to promote the awareness of a global ecological citizenship" (Zapf, 268). In Matthiessen's case, and as this thesis has argued, it is specifically through the writer's engagement with Eastern thought that allows the reader to approach an 'awareness of a global ecological citizenship', one that does not habituate either end of the binary poles of Eastern and Western thought, but instead synthesizes, explores, and co-creates a new harmonious space between and within the modes of thought existent in Eastern and Western thought.

Chapter Three: A Meditation Place

"Meditating is the practical part—in Tibetan, meditation is called gom, which means 'getting used to.' To become deeply familiar with a set of meditation techniques is to realize the dharma on an existential level. Theory then becomes a kind of practice and practice in turn is a form of theoretical reflection, a radical hesitation in the face of one's confusion (Boon, Cazdyn, Morton,14)

"I'd parted with the Zen master I was working with originally, as had most of his senior students, so I was without a teacher. I was in touch with another Zen teacher only intermittently, so I made the writing and composition of *The Snow Leopard* my practice. I did a lot of study–a lot of sitting and meditation with it" (Matthiessen Interview, *Missouri Review*).

"Sitting and meditating is all that is required to achieve enlightenment in Zen" (Ambalu, 162).

This meditation chapter will use a close reading approach to analyze Matthiessen's practice of meditation. The analysis will attempt to locate this Eastern spiritual practice within the larger framework of this thesis. It is important to note that, not including the introductions by both Pico Iyer and Richard Mabey, nor the index, the words *meditate* and *meditation* together appear 34 times in Matthiessen's text. This number falls far short of the overwhelming 162 direct references Matthiessen makes to Buddhism or the Buddha. It is through Matthiessen's engagement with meditation, however, that his Buddhist practice, and Eastern thought processes becomes most clear.

An interesting study could use a chronological list of all appearances of the two words meditate and meditation, coupled with a close-reading of each and every instance of this key practice in the passages, however, there is not enough space available in this thesis to accomplish the task. Remaining close to the task of understanding meditation within the primary text, this final chapter will also include passages that relate to meditation in a non-explicit sense, though these will number less than the number of explicit meditation passages. To give an example to

help the reader understand this point further, a passage from the *At Crystal Mountain* section reads:

> The secret of the mountains is that the mountains simply exist, as I do myself: the mountains exist simply, which I do not. The mountains have no 'meaning,' they are meaning; the mountains are. The sun is round. I ring with life, and the mountains ring, and when I can hear it, there is a ringing that we share. I understand all this, not in my mind but in my heart, knowing how meaningless it is to try to capture what cannot be expressed, knowing that mere words will remain when I read it all again, another day (Matthiessen, 639).

A question to ask, as an example, would be: where in this passage would a kernel of theory about Matthiessen's perceptions of meditation be found? Matthiessen's idea of 'how meaningless it is to try to capture what cannot be expressed,' can be used as a marker into his understanding of the subject - culled from the personal education and experience of his time with meditation. It becomes quickly apparent how delicate the balance of suspension that Matthiessen creates, owing to the necessary component of a meditation duality, a duality that oscillates between *knowing* and *unknowing*.

Matthiessen uses meta-awareness when he finishes the statement with a quandary for both writer and reader: 'knowing that mere words will remain when I read it all again, another day.' What, then, is the difference between mere words on the page, that exist physically to be *reexpressed* at a later time, and the spoken word, that can say the same thing, literally word for word, yet seemingly disappear. The action is not an un-remaining one, as Matthiessen claims. What was expressed, such as 'the sun is round' does not necessarily un-remain, it may live on inside the expressions that continually circuit around our brains, specifically: memory and feeling. We feel and know 'the sun is round,' so it is not in a process of un-remaining because it remains in us. 'Mere words' written on a page have both this *un-remaining effect*, as well as a baser, and opposite, *remaining effect*. They only appear more permanent, or, *remaining*, because of their *re-existibility* in the form of ink, tree pulp, and adhesive, able to be consumed by masses of human eyes uncountable times. This *remaining* effect also plays into a spiritual sustainability, as Zapf claims that literary texts become "the medium of a spiritual form of sustainability, which

both reflects and redeems what is continually lost in the material world of nature, time, and history" (Zapf, 22).

The previous paragraph outlines the approach in this chapter of the thesis at originality in insight revolving around the exploration of meditation and Buddhism in Matthiessen's text, while remaining faithful to the task of contributing and focusing on a close reading of Matthiessen's text. In the *At Crystal Mountain* passage, Matthiessen does not explicitly mention Buddhism, but it will become clear in almost every cited passage that Buddhism pervades Matthiessen's thoughts, whether explicitly mentioned or not. For this reason, this chapter focuses on meditation as the main subject, because Buddhism is a tangential topic that is never far from Matthiessen's meditation practice.

As previously stated, *The Snow Leopard* is under-explored, under-represented, and densely complex. It is a text that offers much for contemporary readers looking for new perspectives on imagined futures in our global environmental struggle.

D.T. Suzuki, one of the bridging luminaries of Zen Buddhism for Westerners, and referenced in *The Snow Leopard*, is an important source to bring in. Relevant to this thesis, we can parse Suzuki's words on meditation, to better help us situate Matthiessen's writing. Suzuki states:

> Whatever meditation Zen may propose, then, will be to take things as they are, to consider snow white and the raven black. When we speak of meditation we in most cases refer to its abstract character; that is, meditation is known to be the concentration of the mind on some highly generalized proposition, which is, in the nature of things, not always closely and directly connected with the concrete affairs of life. Zen perceives or feels, and does not abstract nor meditate. Zen penetrates and is finally lost in the immersion. Meditation, on the other hand, is outspokenly dualistic and consequently inevitably superficial (Suzuki, 42).

This passage exemplifies the necessary task of using Matthiessen's sources to understand the author's own inquiries into meditation. Suzuki unequivocally states that 'Zen perceives or feels, and does not abstract nor meditate...meditation on the other hand, is outspokenly dualistic and consequently inevitably superficial.' This passage transmits valuable information on the pitfalls

Matthiessen himself is grappling with in his personal meditation practices.

Suzuki discusses the 'outwardly dualistic' nature of meditation, which was referred to after Matthiessen's *At Crystal Mountain* meditation passage, and which can be understood in the larger inquiry into Eastern and Western thought. The keystone to this passage, however, is something that is echoed throughout Matthiessen's meditation passages: 'take things as they are, to consider snow white and the raven black.' This is precisely what was found in Matthiessen's words cited earlier: 'the mountains are. The sun is round.' How does Matthiessen sit - literally and figuratively - with the duality of meditation as a practice that allows him to 'simply exist,' yet eludes the capture of human language?

"Perhaps she knows better than to think at all, but goes simply about the business of survival, like the wolf; survival is her way of meditation" (Matthiessen, 653). Matthiessen is doing far more than surviving on this journey. Matthiessen should be considered a true scholar of Buddhism, in light of *The Snow Leopard* text. This means holding the difficult duality of meditation that he confronts, while continuously pushing against his words, searching for a deeper understanding and meaning. Though 'mere words will remain,' they will remain to enlighten us in this chapter's pursuit.

Matthiessen's journey to the preordained area of the Crystal Mountain was a physical journey, along with the non-physical spiritual explorations along the way. This fact creates a fundamental binary in the physical setting of where Matthiessen chose to meditate. Either Matthiessen was at his meditation place, on the mountain, or he was mobily restricted to locate a place conducive to his meditating practice. As we will find through his writing, this mobile restriction can, in fact, be spiritually emancipating. In the *At Crystal Mountain* section, where it is appropriate to locate the unbeginnable thread of this close reading of Matthiessen's meditation words, there is a lot to unpack:

> I have a meditation place on Somdo mountain, a broken rock outcrop like an altar set into the hillside, protected from all but the south wind by shards of granite and dense thorn. In the full sun it is warm, and its rock crannies give shelter to small stunted plants that cling to this desert mountainside—dead red-brown stalks of a wild buckwheat (Polygonum), some shrubby cinquefoil, pale edelweiss, and everlasting, and even a few poor wisps of

> Cannabis. I arrange a rude rock seat as a lookout on the world, set out binoculars in case wild creatures should happen into view, then cross my legs and regulate my breath, until I scarcely breathe at all (Matthiessen, 636).

Matthiessen invokes a merging of the naturalistic and spiritual at the 'broken rock outcrop like an altar set into the hillside.' The journey in *The Snow Leopard* text is at heart, a fundamental dualistic journey with naturalistic and spiritual elements, and Eastern and Western thought, as the text displays consistently throughout: 'I arrange a rude rock seat as a lookout on the world.' A lookout on the world, a place to gain insight and perspective while being stationary, yet present in both the outer and inner landscapes Matthiessen encounters. This lookout is infused with spiritual elements, and a spiritual hue, through Buddhism - all atop a rude rock, the naturalistic element Matthiessen finds so elementary, literally grounding and spiritually grounding to his meditation.

This dualism is inherent in both Matthiessen and Schaller, as discussed in the second chapter, and which is further grounded in a line by Zapf, perfectly situating the duality of the spiritual and natural, or Eastern and Western thought: "For both of them, the relationship between *culture and nature*, and thus between the *natural sciences and the humanities* seems to have special significance, even if they approach this relationship from different angles" (Zapf, 242). This dualism between the two men is significant to repeat here because it overlaps and strengthens an understanding of Matthiessen's conception of the practice of meditation, and the 'different angle' of Eastern thought that he approaches his meditation through:

> The hermitage is situated so that nothing may be seen but snow peaks rising to a shining sky; even Shey is hidden by the slopes above the village. The effect is so hallucinatory that GS, disturbed, is stirred to protest at the hermit's life, and solitary meditation: "You have to have something coming in!" But the point of meditation is to let everything go: "When your mind is empty like a valley or a canyon, then you will know the power of the Way"" (Matthiessen, 619-20).

'You have to have something coming in!' This utterance by Schaller triggers a reflection by Matthiessen which is of great importance when contrasted with the entire depository of meditation references in *The Snow Leopard*: the experience of meditation revolves around a

truth, according to Matthiessen, that the greatest aim is to 'let everything go,' which he then clarifies with the final line, from Lao Tzu's influential *Tao Te Ching*. Matthiessen focuses on letting go, but Tzu, in the same book, also writes that: "Do, and do wrong; Hold on, and lose. Not doing, the wise soul doesn't do it wrong, and not holding on, doesn't lose it" (Tzu, qtd. in Le Guin, 82). It is not only necessary to let go to approach 'the point of meditation,' but also to not hold on, which is fundamentally different from the concept of letting go.

Emptying the mind is clearly a keystone in Matthiessen's practice of meditation: "and sometimes I sit in meditation, doing my best to empty out my mind, to attain that state in which everything is 'at rest, free, and immortal. . . . All things abided eternally as they were in their proper places . . . something infinite behind everything appeared'" (Matthiessen, 635). Matthiessen explicitly outlines his intention of emptying his mind, this practice that is truest to his idea of meditation, so that he can reach, in the words of Thomas Traherne, the appearance of "something infinite behind everything." Pushing against the concept of letting go, it does not necessarily equate to what Matthiessen seems to imply as a synonymous concept: emptying the mind. Letting go does not immediately insinuate the act of emptying, though this territory is fraught with murky abstractions, due to the nature of language that was given treatment in the first chapter, and which Matthiessen struggled with: attempting to capture what cannot be expressed. It is this crucial struggle that stalks Matthiessen throughout *The Snow Leopard* as he attempts to succeed in two pursuits that are equal parts of a binary zero sum game: the impossibility of conveying what he is experiencing, through an imperfect human language system incapable of fully registering the presence of his meditation practice.

The practice of emptying the mind helps to return to the starting point of this chapter, the meditation place that Matthiessen chose to remain at during his stay at Crystal Mountain. An important question to ask is whether or not it is an easier task to empty the mind, or to open the mind. In the following passage, again taken from the *At Crystal Mountain* section, Matthiessen, retrospectively through his writing, layers the image of a meditating man in physical stillness, with descriptive and vivid naturalistic observations of the landscape - including the motionless forms, as well as the organically living forms.

Against the faces of the canyon, shadows of griffons turn. Perhaps the Somdo raptors

> think that this queer lump on the landscape—the motionless form of a man in meditation—is the defunct celebrant in an air burial, for a young eagle, plumage burnished a heraldic bronzy-black, draws near with its high peeping, and a lammergeier, approaching from behind, descends with a sudden rush of feathers, sweeping so close past my head that I feel the break of air (Matthiessen, 693-694).

The canyon, an inert, motionless object, is not in fact motionless, as Matthiessen anthropomorphically projects onto it the animal and human construct of faces, which denotes change - because faces are never fully rigid or fixed. Matthiessen himself is a 'queer lump on the landscape,' a man practicing his meditation without moving. What does the queer lump entail? Is it any queerer than a canyon, lumped between rivers and clouds? Is the canyon not itself in a deep time form of meditation, queerly fixed, yet perpetually changing through different faces of the elements and life whirring around it?

Zooming in on the paradoxically evocative out-of-body description of himself, Matthiessen attempts to enter the Somdo raptors' perception, ruminating on the possibility of the raptors sensing him as a 'defunct celebrant in an air burial.' Again, understanding that Matthiessen is retroactively imposing these details, his consistency with which he dedicates himself to the practice of meditation must be questioned. If Matthiessen's mind were open, it would make sense that he is grasping at senses from non-human entities, such as the raptors. If, however, Matthiessen is emptying his mind - as he claims he tries his best to do - then how could he possibly escape his human perceptions that he returns to later in writing? If his mind were empty, how would he notice the lammergeier, descending behind him and rushing on, feathers and all? While certainly adding vibrancy, the lush naturalistic details impart a certain excitement to Matthiessen's meditation passages, transporting us from outside of his emptiness to the merging of his motionless form with the very real world around him. Matthiessen challenges the close reader to confront elusive constructions of his meditation practice with the duality he erects between emptiness and form, emptying and noticing.

Half a hundred pages later, while still at his Crystal Mountain sanctuary, Matthiessen bolsters his dichotomy of emptying and opening of the mind, or in the following case, which may confound the reader even more - the brain.

> Near my lookout, I find a place to meditate, out of the wind, a hollow on the ridge where snow has melted. My brain soon clears in the cold mountain air, and I feel better. Wind, blowing grasses, sun: the dying grass, the notes of southbound birds in the mountain sky are no more fleeting than the rock itself, no more so and no less—all is the same. The mountain withdraws into its stillness, my body dissolves into the sunlight, tears fall that have nothing to do with 'I'. What it is that brings them on, I do not know (Matthiessen, 744-5).

This passage, on first look, brings about confusion. Matthiessen already claimed that he had a meditation place, but here, near his lookout, he finds a different place to mediate. He feels his brain clearing, which brings a repose to his mood. His brain is clearing, but is it opening, or emptying? It is here that I would argue Matthiessen is conflating emptying with opening. In regards to meditation, emptying the mind should not necessarily be the end goal, though Matthiessen chronicles this as one of the de facto principles of his pursuit. As documented earlier by Schaller, there has to be something coming in, or at least some aspect of consciousness that is present and aware, which Matthiessen readily proves through his naturalistic observations to be correct - there is much coming into his mind, even during meditation, from the outside sensory world. How could a mind - or brain - be empty, and yet still register 'wind, blowing grasses, sun: the dying grass, the notes of southbound birds in the mountain sky.' It is the opening of the mind, perhaps *through* the emptying and clearing, that Matthiessen is actually trying to accomodate. We may find in his citations of Buddhism, Zen in particular, conflict between the true meaning and pursuit of meditation, but it is through Matthiessen's own words, his own reflections upon his meditative practices, that an understanding as to what form meditation produces for him, again looking at what remains: *mere words*, yet words that convey as precise a meaning as a writer like Matthiessen can produce.

3.1 Nothing-But-The-Present

On one of the final days Matthiessen is present at Crystal Mountain, November 15th, he chronicles a crucial passage for the close reader to examine: one which takes us closer to the

center of his conception of the meditation practice, but which also strains our ability to hold Matthiessen's idea of meditation as a fixed and concrete way.

> The purpose of meditation practice is not enlightenment; it is to pay attention even at unextraordinary times, to be of the present, nothing-but-the-present, to bear this mindfulness of now into each event of ordinary life. To be anywhere else is 'to paint eyeballs on chaos'. When I watch blue sheep, I must watch blue sheep, not be thinking about sex, danger, or the present, for this present—even while I think of it—is gone (Matthiessen, 748).

As Matthiessen outlined through his sources before the *At Crystal Mountain* section of the book, and also elucidated upon earlier in this thesis chapter, enlightenment is not the goal of meditation - though it may be the true end goal of certain strands of Buddhism and other major spiritual practices of the world. In this passage, Matthiessen seems to be direct and unambiguous in his definition of the purpose of meditation: to pay attention in all moments; to be present - an equally important task in the mundane moments and in the exhilarating. There is a 'nothing-but-the-present' being that must imbue the practitioning meditator, in Matthiessen's conception, to obtain the true purpose. To allow a consciousness not fully present would be 'to paint eyeballs on chaos,' in the words of Dogen Zenji. Matthiessen uses this evocative quote to signal an illusion some may be tempted to believe in: anything but being present is merely an adulteration of what it truly means to practice meditation.

At the end of the passage, there is another example of how Matthiessen continuously attempts to crystallize a clear conveying of what his meditation practice is foundationalized on, yet by his own admission - which will be expanded upon later in this chapter - he never seems to fully grasp it, bringing up differentiations each time he seems to come to a resting point on what the true purpose of his meditation practice is. When he talks about watching blue sheep, he is not to be thinking about sex, or danger, which is simple to understand, but Matthiessen goes on to proclaim that he should not even be thinking of the present itself. Instead of thinking *about* the present, Matthiessen administers the thought of being *of* the present, which he delineates as two separate categories. The reason he gives is fixated on the transitory effect of the present, which is

perpetually here and now, yet also continuously elusive, because if we are to think of the present, we are not of the present, and we cannot experience the present as it is meant to be experienced.

Building on the passage previously discussed, there are four additional sentences which actually preceded the 'nothing-but-the-present passage' in *The Snow Leopard*, yet help situate this chapter's momentum by inverting the order in which they are found in the book:

> My foot slips on a narrow ledge: in that split second, as needles of fear pierce heart and temples, eternity intersects with present time. Thought and action are not different, and stone, air, ice, sun, fear, and self are one. What is exhilarating is to extend this acute awareness into ordinary moments, in the moment-by-moment experiencing of the lammergeier and the wolf, which, finding themselves at the center of things, have no need for any secret of true being. In this very breath that we take now lies the secret that all great teachers try to tell us, what one lama refers to as 'the precision and openness and intelligence of the present' (Matthiessen, 747).

At first glance, Matthiessen's 'moment-by-moment experiencing of the lammergeier and the wolf' appears to be the synonymous link to his 'bear this mindfulness of now into each event of ordinary life' from the previous passage - to be of the present. Using a closer reading, however, there is something profound in Matthiessen's words that is as succinct a description of his 'of the present' as anywhere else in the text: *eternity intersects with present time*. This idea was tangentially encountered in the second chapter through Schaller, but for the purposes here in the meditation chapter, it aptly unfolds the truth that Matthiessen is getting at, that the here and now is all there is - and all there ever will be. The reader would be forgiven for thinking that Matthiessen, in a text thoroughly steeped with Buddhist sources, would incorporate the word eternity dozens of times, or at the very least to use it to underpin some of his spiritual phrasing, yet the fact is that Matthiessen only uses the word eternity seven times - and one of those is as a footnote. The other usages besides the 'eternity intersects with present time' are not particularly useful for this study, but there is one that bolsters Matthiessen's own argument that the intersection of the present can be found in eternity: "then lunacy is gone, leaving an echo. The lizard is still there, one with its rock, flanks pulsing in the star heat that brings warmth to our common skin; eternity is not remote, it is here beside us" (Matthiessen, 682).

Thinking back to Matthiessen's *of* the present, as opposed to thinking *about* the present, we find in this passage a tricky line that again abstracts the search for Matthiessen's meditation: 'thought and action are not different, and stone, air, ice, sun, fear, and self are one.' There are echoes of Matthiessen's use of these elements in Zapf's Literature as Cultural Ecology theory: "the use of the elements in literature involves not only physical, material but also internal, psychocultural realities. A cultural-ecological approach looks at these mutual translations between external and internal ecosystems with special attention" (Zapf, 186). The 'internal, psychocultural realities' are Matthiessen's thoughts, and the 'external and internal ecosystems' the interconnectedness of humans and nature, including the culture of Buddhism and the practice of meditation.

If thought and action are indeed not different, as Matthiessen claims, does this mean that they are the same? To be actively of the present - in action and practice - our thoughts must also be included, because they are engaged with the presentness of our situation. This may be a semantic tug at the thread of Matthiessen's meditative presence, honing in on a mere differentiation between *of* and *about*, but what should be questioned is how Matthiessen can be of the present without also necessarily thinking about the present with the veil of human language? If Matthiessen was not equipped with a language to describe what he is seeing, he could easily remain *of* the present, just like the lammergeier and the wolf, but because he has the scaffolding of words and language, he cannot possibly transcend the residue of this very human framework. Or maybe this is the very essence of what he tries to reach in his meditation, and then to try and permeate through the ordinary moments: the absence of thought about the present, which helps him reach a total presence, a presence that has no sides - it is simply one with everything around him: a complete dissolution.

3.2 Dissolution of the Mind

There is evidence for Matthiessen bringing the idea of dissolution to his practice of meditation, which merges with his idea of emptying the mind, opening the mind, and clearing the mind: "near the white shrine at the point of rivers, I spend a peaceful afternoon in meditation, letting

my mind dissolve in the bright tumult where the rivers meet" (Matthiessen, 925). This passage is from *The Way Home* section, the final section, and it is the first and only time Matthiessen uses the term dissolve to directly relate to his meditation practice. What is interesting to note, is that the word and idea of dissolving is seldom used in *The Snow Leopard*. Due to the spiritual material of the book, it is surprising that dissolve is only used 11 times, one of those occasions directly related to meditation, and half of the remainder being used to talk about experiences related to his wife, Deborah. Knowing of her passing to cancer, which was a large impetus for the undertaking of the journey itself, this may not come as a surprise that Matthiessen used the word dissolve when relating the idea to her. Much was dissolved for Matthiessen as Deborah moved through diagnosis to the cessation of life, and so, when he uses dissolve for the final time, quoted above, it is actually the first time he relates it to his meditation - his mind in dissolution, in a borderline oxymoronic phrase of 'bright tumult', at the meeting of the rivers. The use of dissolution will be used as an idea of the mind dissolving in meditation, though it is only said once, when it is laid out next to the other three main ideas of how Matthiessen relates mind to meditation: emptying, opening, and clearing. The question will be if any of these four ideas expresses Matthiessen's meditative practice in the closest sense. Conversely, is it possible that all four are equally accurate in transmitting the idea of meditation through language?

3.3 Emptying, Clearing, Dissolving, and Opening of the Mind

Now that enough of Matthiessen's meditation passages have been covered to get a better grasp of what the practice signified for him, the search for a closer understanding of his meditation can follow. There are four main pillars I classify through this chapter's research of Matthiessen's meditation passages - all four of which indicate an action of the mind. These four pillars are *emptying*, *opening*, *clearing*, and *dissolving*. It is not a matter of which appears the most, but which of these, if any, transmit the truest sense of Matthiessen's practice.

These four pillars will help to build the theoretical structure of Matthiessen's conception of the truth - not the truth regarding his journey, but more relevantly, the truth surrounding his meditative practice. The four pillars of his meditative practice, which have been briefly touched on with the passages already outlined in the previous subsections, represent the main meditative

tools Matthiessen uses to approach meditation. How these four actions clear the path to truth is not necessarily difficult to conceive if they are taken as individual cogs on his meditative wheel, but it becomes a little trickier to pin down clear boundaries amongst the interwovenness between emptying, opening, clearing and dissolving.

To go even deeper with the four pillars of Matthiessen's mediation, I will attempt to link each separate idea with one of the founding keystones of Buddhism, which are the Four Noble Truths. I will use this analogy of the Four Noble Truths to compare to Matthiessen's four pillars of meditation, which will strengthen the analysis of Matthiessen's meditative practice, while also bringing to light for the reader what the Four Noble Truths are, and how they are the foundation of the original founding of Buddhism, which laid the groundwork for all subsequent strands of Buddhism.

The Four Noble Truths in Buddhism are:

1. The Truth of Suffering (*dukkha*)
2. The Truth of Arising (*samudaya*)
3. The Truth of Cessation (*nirodha*)
4. The Truth of the Path (*magga*) (Keown, 50-58).

Boon, Cazdyn, and Morton include a broad definition of the Four Noble Truths in the glossary of their book about three theoretical inquiries into Buddhism. It will help give the reader a basic overview of what the Noble Truths, and the subsequent Eightfold Path, are:

> The truth that unawakened life is necessarily unsatisfactory, the truth that dissatisfaction and suffering are caused by grasping at pleasures resulting from mistaken views of the world, the truth that an end to all dissatisfaction and suffering is possible, and the truth of the Noble Eightfold Path leading from unawakened existence to complete enlightenment. That path consists of right view, intent, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. According to traditional accounts of the Buddha's life and teachings, the Four Noble Truths were the topic of his first dharma talk" (Boon, Cazdyn, Morton, 582).

Broadly speaking, and according to Damien Keown, if "the ultimate goal of Buddhism is to put an end to suffering and rebirth" (Keown, 48), then we would assume that Matthiessen's practice also has this one goal in mind. Not only was Matthiessen's journey impelled by his own personal suffering from the loss of his wife, Matthiessen detailed how his meditative practice attempted to overcome the suffering that his mind created, which is through the four pillars we are looking at. According to Keown's translation of what the Buddha said, "both in the past and now, I set forth only this: suffering and the end of suffering" (Keown, 48). Matthiessen suffers, whether acutely through insights leading to realizations, or less dramatically through something such as the diffusion of attention, during his meditations. "When Buddhists meditate, for example, they are not seeking to communicate with God but endeavouring to cultivate wisdom and compassion" (Keown, 8). Matthiessen is certainly seeking to communicate with a certain presence, but that presence is a certain truth. I would argue that Matthiessen, through the meditation passages, is more interested in cultivating wisdom than he is compassion.

Before moving into the Four Noble Truths and their linkage to the four pillars of meditative practice by Matthiessen, it would help to get a snapshot of the Four Noble Truths as written by Matthiessen himself, referencing Sakyamuni:[11]

> 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 man's 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 one's understanding, intentions, speech, and actions; right livelihood, effort, mindfulness; right concentration, by which is meant the unification of the self through sitting yoga (Matthiessen, 100).

The last two steps of the Eight-fold Path, specifically the words 'mindfulness' and 'right concentration,' can both point to the practice of meditation in general, though it differs slightly

[11] Much could be written about and referenced regarding Sakyamuni, considering he is the man who the entire religion of Buddhism is founded on. For our purposes here, a concise quote from *The Snow Leopard* will suffice in contextualizing him from Matthiessen's point of view: "Later he was known as Sakyamuni (Sage of the Sakyas), and afterward, the Buddha—the Awakened One" (98).

from Keown's conception of the Path, which has for the eighth step 'right meditation.' Matthiessen goes on to speak of the 'unification' that one can achieve with their own self, which is an important aspect to consider for Buddhism, and throughout *The Snow Leopard* text, because according to Matthiessen's research into the Buddha, "his way holds that self-realization is the greatest contribution one can make to one's fellow man" (Matthiessen, 103). How one reaches this self-realization, as we will see, is multitudinous, but for Matthiessen, it always ends up back at the sitting place, and back in the practice of meditation.

3.4 Suffering as Emptying

Looking at the First Noble Truth, Suffering, it is not difficult to intuitively understand all of the different areas in which the lives of human beings are enmeshed with suffering. However, going beyond the obvious, we find "association with what's pleasant is suffering, disassociation from what's pleasant is suffering" (Keown, 51). Keown goes on to assert that suffering, or *dukkha*, is not a perfect translation of what *dukkha* truly means.[12] Keown claims that there is a more abstract and pervasive sense to the word *dukkha*, which hinges on the idea that all good things are ephemeral, and that humans become bored with novelty, because all novelty fades into mundanity. In this way, he claims that even if life seems to be absent of suffering, because it is not inherently painful, it can still be "unsatisfactory and unfulfilling" (Keown), which he then uses to contextually situate the word "unsatisfactoriness" to capture a better English word to the idea of *dukkha.* If we use unsatisfactoriness, along with suffering, it will become easier to relate to Matthiessen's meditative practice. The reason for this is because Matthiessen is rarely suffering during his actual meditations, but he encounters moments of unsatisfactoriness throughout the journey, moments that are often outside of his meditative practice. The Noble Truth of Suffering, also conceptualized as unsatisfactoriness, relates to the first pillar of Matthiessen's meditative practice, which is emptying.

[12] Any scholar working in translation knows the difficulty and peril of transposing mirror meanings of words from different languages, so it's important to grasp the nuances when we are not familiar with the original language. In this case, Keown is the expert.

I relate Matthiessen's practice of emptying to suffering, because suffering, and the unsatisfactoriness of life, is not a sustainable place for human beings to dwell: "but the point of meditation is to let everything go: 'when your mind is empty like a valley or a canyon, then you will know the power of the Way'" (Matthiessen, 620). Matthiessen embraces the Way through the emptying of his mind, and he attempts to escape suffering, and unsatisfactoriness by emptying his mind like the valleys and canyons he is perceiving on his journey. When Matthiessen engages with the practice of emptying, he reaches a state of seeing beyond a normal reality, as in a passage earlier used: "I sit in meditation, doing my best to empty out my mind, to attain that state in which everything is 'at rest, free, and immortal. . . . All things abided eternally as they were in their proper places . . . something infinite behind everything appeared'" (Matthiessen, 635). This opens up a conflict, though. Matthiessen, in this passage, appears to understand a deeper truth with his meditation practice of emptying, through the understanding of all things being in an eternal state. Later, he claims that meditation has nothing to do with questions of eternality, which the reader will contend with later in this chapter.

3.5 Arising as Clearing

The second Noble Truth is translated as Arising, or *samudaya*, which I compare to Matthiessen's idea of clearing out the mind during his meditations.

> This, O Monks, is the Truth of the Arising of Suffering. It is this thirst or craving (*taṇhā*) which gives rise to rebirth, which is bound up with passionate delight and which seeks fresh pleasure now here and now there in the form of (1) thirst for sensual pleasure, (2) thirst for existence, and (3) thirst for non-existence (Keown, 53).

Keown frames the Arising Noble Truth as a thirst, or craving. The triadic foundation of thirst in humans, according to the Buddha, is for sensual pleasure, existence, and non-existence. The first two are clear enough, but it is the third side of Arising that is more difficult to grasp. Looking at one of Matthiessen's passages where he explicitly relates meditation to a clear mind, we can find the second idea of thirst at play, and peering with a deeper analytical mind, we find the third idea of non-existence exhibited:

> but perhaps because I had been in meditation since before daybreak and my mind was clear, I saw at once that she was dying, and the certainty of this clairvoyance was so shocking that I had to feign emergency and push rudely into the bathroom, to get hold of myself so that I could speak (Matthiessen, 344-5).

Matthiessen's clairvoyance is juxtaposed to his clearness, or clarity of mind. His meditation from before daybreak had settled him into a clear mental mood, one that opened up this clairvoyance he speaks of. Does this clearness mean that his being was in a state of non-thirst? Whether or not this is true, we find his thirst for existence, and subsequently non-existence overwhelming him, as he realized his wife Deborah was dying. The concept of Matthiessen's clearing is related to Arising because in his meditative practice the opportunity to clear away the three thirsts outlined by Keown are present. Matthiessen cannot escape the thirst for existence, as he allows his emotions to overwhelm him, even after his mind has been cleared through early morning meditation. He is aware that his wife will pass, and that the thirst for existence will be relinquished against the reality of mortality, but looking deeper, we find an internal struggle being described as Matthiessen grapples with what non-existence signifies for *his* life, which will soon be without his marriage partner.

Another passage that illustrates the thirst that derives from the Truth of Arising: "at dark, I join Tukten and Dawa at the fire. Drinking our arak quietly, we talk little, feeling dull, content. I wonder if Tukten will drink heavily, but he does not" (925). This is a point where the reader can look deeper into the Truth of Arising through the words of Matthiessen's, while holding the idea of clearing in mind. Matthiessen is drinking arak - "arak, or raki—white spirits distilled from rice or maize or millet" (160) with Tukten and Dawa, so he is engaged in the process of literally quenching his thirst, while also engaging his thirst for a spirit, which relates to the Second Noble Truth of Arising. Also, Matthiessen's awareness and previous documentation of Tukten's drinking issues in the text frame the situation in an awareness of the boundaries of what we can assume is appropriate thirst, or moderate drink. Tukten is an interesting case study on his own:

> A Sherpa among the porters, a spirit that no one is entirely comfortable with, a man who has the feel of a sorcerer and is accused of being a thief, Tukten is the most slippery and

> unsettling presence in the mountains, and his air of threat sometimes seems more charged and intense than that of the elements themselves (Iyer, qtd. in Matthiessen, 38).

In the arak passage, Matthiessen is exhibiting his ability to turn the valve off on a craving, in this case the craving to consume more spirit than what he signifies as a moderate amount. The men do not speak much, and their minds and senses are closing down from the strenuous efforts of that particular day. What, though, makes this desire for a moderate amount of arak acceptable? It may seem that any desire for what is not absolutely necessary to sustain life would be seen as frivolous to a Buddhist perspective: "whereas wrong desires restrict and fetter, right desires enhance and liberate" (Keown, 54-5). How do we create a boundary between a wrong desire and a right desire? How can Matthiessen clear himself of these desires? Keown goes on to describe the idea that the word desire, much like thirst, does not perfectly capture the idea of the Second Noble Truth of Arising. There is *taṇhā*, but there is another word Keown cites from Buddhist sources, *chanda*, which sheds a more positive light on the idea of desire. There can be wholesome desires, such as trying to make the world a better place, the desire for happiness in others, even attaining nirvana (Keown). These are all relatable to the idea of clearing: clearing the mind of desires that fetter and restrict, clearing the ego of clinginess to allow space for growth in oneself, and how one desires happiness and growth from others. These desires are practiced in daily life, as well as in Matthiessen's meditations.

One more passage which illustrates the difficulty of connoting desire as good or bad, right or wrong, which is taken from Basho, the haiku poet referenced in the second chapter. Matthiessen uses Basho for an epigraph before the *At Crystal Mountain* section:

> Days and months are the travelers of eternity. So are the years that pass by. . . . I myself have been tempted for a long time by the cloud-moving wind—filled with a strong desire to wander. . . . I walked through mists and clouds, breathing the thin air of high altitudes and stepping on slippery ice and snow, till at last through a gateway of clouds, as it seemed, to the very paths of the sun and moon, I reached the summit, completely out of breath and nearly frozen to death. Presently the sun went down and the moon rose glistening in the sky (Matthiessen, 562).

Basho is ‘filled with a strong desire to wander,’ which Matthiessen is doing hundreds of years later on his own journey to Crystal Mountain. This desire, in both Basho’s case and Matthiessen’s, allow the men to discover truths about themselves, to observe truths about the natural world, and to hopefully return to their societal lives with the desire to make the community a better place.

When desire is used this way, it is important to make use of the basic tool of etymology. Desire, from Latin *desiderare*, from *de-* + *sider-, sidus* heavenly body (Merriam-Webster). Keown does not make use of this specific etymological link of the English word, claiming the word has a far larger semantic range. However, it is relevant that the Latin root connotes, among some scholarly debate, the idea of a heavenly body, in the sense of the literal heavenly bodies above us - the literal celestial bodies. Whether the etymological root of the word desire can be traced back to a heavenly body, or star, “it does at least seem... that before the word denoted ‘wanting,’ it signified ‘lack’” (Ayto, 166). Desire can be conceptualized in a deeper way than originally transcripted through Keown’s binary of *taṇhā/chanda*. *Taṇhā*, according to Keown’s translation, is a desire of perversion, a perversion that is directed to the wrong areas, or excessively exhibited (Keown). *Chanda*, on the other side of the binary, is translated as "pleasing, alluring, lovely, delightful or charming", and is based on the root *chad* which means "esteemed to please, to seem good, feel pleasant and/or something that nourishes, gratifies or is celebrated" (Monier-Williams, 332). While both of these Sanskrit words, and their translations to English, connote some kind of desire, nowhere in either of the words do we find the same kind of etymological meaning that is affixed to the English word desire. We can open up the word desire to the possibility that there are celestial connotations dating from its etymology, which makes Matthiessen’s idea of meditative clearing - perhaps the desire of meditative clearing around the second Noble Truth of Arising - a more complex notion.

3.6 Cessation as Dissolving

The Third Noble Truth is Cessation, or *nirodha*; it is the cessation of suffering, and one which relates to Matthiessen’s idea of dissolving: “this, O Monks, is the Truth of the Cessation of

Suffering. It is the utter cessation of that craving, the withdrawal from it, the renouncing of it, the rejection of it, the liberation from it, nonattachment to it" (Keown, 56). In Matthiessen's own words, in a previously used passage which perfectly illustrates the fusion of cessation and dissolving: "near the white shrine at the point of rivers, I spend a peaceful afternoon in meditation, letting my mind dissolve in the bright tumult where the rivers meet" (Matthiessen, 925). Matthiessen's mind is at peace, in a bright confluence of rivers. The singular moment of Matthiessen near the white shrine and the rivers' confluence conjures images of water dissolving from the rushing of snow melt, along with impurities swept along in the water. Matthiessen uses language to reflect the nature around him, but it also helps us to understand his mental mindscape, in this case, the link between the dissolving of the rivers, and the dissolution that brings clarity to his mind. Keown goes on to say that:

> it is clear that nirvana-in-this-life is a psychological and ethical reality, a transformed state of personality characterized by peace, deep spiritual joy, compassion, and a refined and subtle awareness. Negative mental states and emotions such as doubt, worry, anxiety, and fear are absent from the enlightened mind (Keown, 57).

The negative mindscapes and emotions that Keown speaks of can be present to varying degrees in certain enlightened minds, namely saints, though ordinary people can of course exhibit them as well. The four negative emotions that are outlined: doubt, worry, anxiety and fear are all emotions that Matthiessen has been transparent about through his duty to record the honest truth during his journey. Cessation, in relation to Matthiessen's meditative practice, is clearly the point at which Matthiessen attempts to dissolve his mind to reach clarity and peace. Earlier on, in the *Westward* section, Matthiessen brings up an important idea of dissolution, in relation to a glass vessel, in the doctrine of Maya:[13]

> Maya is Time, the illusion of the ego, the stuff of individual existence, the dream that separates us from a true perception of the whole. It is often likened to a sealed glass vessel that separates the air within from the clear and unconfined air all around, or water from the all-encompassing sea. Yet the vessel itself is not different from the sea, and to

[13] In this sense, the doctrine of Maya can be interpreted broadly "to signify the absolute nonentity of the phenomenal world" (Coomaraswamy, 209).

> shatter or dissolve it brings about the reunion with all universal life that mystics seek, the homegoing, the return to the lost paradise of our 'true nature' (Matthiessen, 237).

The vessel is not different from the water of the sea, but to understand this, the ego, and individual existence, must be understood in a different way. This happens when the cessation of craving occurs, or more importantly, when we are liberated from it, when we reach a nonattachment to it. This nonattachment, in the meditative practice of Matthiessen, is his letting of the mind dissolve. Matthiessen reaches points where he may attain a kind of cessation, or liberation and nonattachment, but these are only brief, not necessarily fleeting, but nonetheless transitory.

3.7 The Path As Opening

The final Noble Truth and the link to Matthiessen's opening as a meditative practice, is the Noble Truth of the Path. This Noble Truth, while simplistic on the surface, has many layers. According to Buddhist texts, it is a gateway to eight more steps, which is the Noble Eightfold Path:

> This, O Monks, is the Truth of the Path which leads to the cessation of suffering. It is the Noble Eightfold Path, which consists of (1) Right View, (2) Right Resolve, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right Action, (5) Right Livelihood, (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Mindfulness, (8) Right Meditation (Keown, 58).

Before moving into what exactly this Noble Truth is, and how it relates to the final meditative pillar of Matthiessen's, which is opening, there is a line from the *Westward* section of *The Snow Leopard* that illustrates Matthiessen's understanding of "the mystical search," or the path:

> Hamsun's characters tend to destroy themselves, and Hamsun and Hesse, with the authority of failure, warned of the fatal spell of the mystical search—so did Kierkegaard, who declared that too much 'possibility' led to the madhouse. But when I came upon these cautionary words, I already had what Kierkegaard called 'the sickness of infinitude,' wandering from one path to another with no real recognition that I was

> embarked upon a search, and scarcely a clue as to what I might be after. I only knew that at the bottom of each breath there was a hollow place that needed to be filled (Matthiessen, 172).

There is a heavy and obvious tone of pessimism that pervades this passage. The passage follows a certain number of pages cataloguing the grief and mourning Matthiessen and his children went through when Deborah passed away to cancer, which Matthiessen is linking with the well-known literary names of Knut Hamsun, Herman Hesse, and Søren Kierkegaard - writers famous for their prose and letters that face the subject of death and loss. This passage is critical to the link between the meditative pillar of opening and the fourth Noble Truth; the sentences 'wandering from one path to another with no real recognition that I was embarked upon such a search, and scarcely a clue as to what I might be after. I only knew that at the bottom of each breath there was a hollow place that needed to be filled,' are precisely the descriptive passages that strengthen an understanding of Matthiessen's meditative opening, concomitant to the Noble Truth Path. The passage exemplifies what is arguably the overall spirit of Matthiessen's meditation, and potentially the true spirit of all meditation practices, regardless of the particular goal or focus of any meditation session. That spirit is composed of two independent, yet interlocking phenomena that inform the (a) meditation, and (b) following of the path - whether it be the Eightfold path of Buddhism, or a different path.

The first phenomenon is the recognition that there is a path. This does not mean that there is an understanding of the path, where it leads, or what it even consists of in regards to action, thought, and being. In the beginning of the snow leopard journey, in the above passage, Matthiessen admits that he didn't have an idea of which path he was on, or what he might find - or that he was even on a journey of searching. This first phenomenon might be considered in line with the first Noble Truth - suffering or unsatisfactoriness, which I compare to Matthiessen's meditative pillar of emptying. The second phenomenon in the passage is where the heart of Matthiessen's meditation practice, and the potential heart of any meditation, or path of being, becomes apparent: 'at the bottom of each breath there was a hollow place that needed to be filled.'

Panning out to look at the four pillars of Matthiessen's meditation that are matched with the four Noble Truths, there are four active meditative practices that coincide with the bottom of each breath, needing to be filled: (1) emptying, the breath empties out our lungs and our bodies; (2) clearing, the breath clears toxins and old oxygen; (3) dissolving, the breath dissolves the old air we have circulated back into our environment, while intaking new air to dissolve in the environment of our bodies; (4) opening, the breath opens our existence by the sheer fact that we are taking what is outside of us, inside of us, and by taking what is inside of us, back outside of us.

This last thought of the breath being a reciprocal conduit of the outside environment and our own individual environment is something that is practiced in certain types of meditation, and indeed, as Matthiessen and Buddhists write, there shouldn't be much of a delineation between meditative life and waking life, as the practice of meditation is in truth the practice of finding the highest form of living - a communal experience of being an individual seeking and practicing virtue, knowledge and understanding. The Dalia Lama said it more succinctly: "don't try to use what you learn from Buddhism to be a better Buddhist; use it to be a better whatever-you-already-are" (The Dalai Lama, qtd. in Wright, xii).

Related to both dissolving and opening, there is another passage in a recollected anecdote Matthiessen included in the *Westward* section that demonstrates a singular moment of his life - a moment long before he consciously started on a Zen Buddhist path - in which he, much like the breath, dissolved into something larger - taking in that which is outside of him, all around him, and breathing it in to become one:

> One night in 1945, on a Navy vessel in a Pacific storm, my relief on bow watch, seasick, failed to appear, and I was alone for eight hours in a maelstrom of wind and water, noise and iron; again and again, waves crashed across the deck, until water, air, and iron became one. Overwhelmed, exhausted, all thought and emotion beaten out of me, I lost my sense of self, the heartbeat I heard was the heart of the world, I breathed with the mighty risings and declines of earth, and this evanescence seemed less frightening than exalting. Afterward, there was pain of loss—loss of what, I wondered, understanding nothing (Matthiessen, 170).

This singular moment, crystalline in its recollection, is relevant for Matthiessen's breathing because of how he 'breathed with the mighty risings and declines of earth,' the rise of inhalation, the decline of exhalation; becoming one with the heartbeat of the world beating inside of his own rib cage. At the end of the passage, we find the kernel of Matthiessen's main material in the *Westward* section, namely that he did not understand what journey he was on, but he intuitively grasped at an exaltation within the ephemerality. Most people in this type of situation would have felt the opposite emotion: fear. By including this passage, Matthiessen is undergirding the evolution of his spiritual development, something he could not define, yet felt.

I argue that Matthiessen is not talking about fear in the sense of the literal situation, which, though briefly trained to serve in the Navy, would be fear-wracking, a total sensual onslaught: to be alone on bow watch filled with incredibly harsh and abrasive auditory assaults, while being simultaneously responsible for the safety of the ship and crew. What Matthiessen is describing as exaltation, though he still couldn't quite grasp it, is the realization that he was dissolving into the world outside of him, or perhaps, even more exalting, is that there is no difference at all between the world outside of him and the world inside of him, that the two are in fact the same. In each breath, each moment, there is 'a hollow place that needs to be filled,' and though it took a supremely dramatic reality to literally crash this realization into Matthiessen's consciousness, it set him along a path that eventually leads him to the snow leopard journey.

It is once more worth noting the difficulty in Matthiessen's attempt, in *The Snow Leopard*, of conveying the complexities of spiritual practices, spiritual histories and spiritual ideas. Perhaps the latter, spiritual ideas, while naturally being bound up with practices and histories, is where the task of clarity becomes the most difficult. As an example of this difficulty in a specific passage, related to the fourth Noble Truth of the Path, or in the term I've juxtaposed to this related to Matthiessen's meditative journey - opening - there is a significant block of text, which is an endnote to a passage included in the *Northward* section, the second section of the book.

Before looking at the content of the endnote, related to meditation, the path, or the Way, it is significant to first focus on why it illustrates the difficulty of working with spiritual ideas. Spiritual ideas can seem like abstract, non-crystallized vagaries, and for the most part in *The*

Snow Leopard, the spiritual ideas are Buddhist ideas, though plenty of examples of other spiritual ideas are found throughout the text. Matthiessen's contextualization enables readers without much knowledge of these spiritual ideas to grasp what can seem like completely ineffable topics.

> In the absence of a meaningful vocabulary, one must fall back on nebulous terms, on grandiose capital letters, and on Sanskrit. But Sanskrit terms are differently defined by Hindus and Buddhists, and even within Buddhism they blur and overlap a little, like snakes swallowing their tails in that ancient symbol of eternity: *samadhi* (one-pointedness, unification) may lead to *sunyata* (transparency, void) which can open out in a sudden *satori* (glimpse) which may evolve into the *prajna* (transcendent wisdom) of *nirvana* (beyond delusion, beyond all nature, life, and death, beyond becoming) which might be seen as eternal *samadhi*. Thus the circle is complete, every state is conditioned by each of the others, and all are inherent in meditation, which is itself a realization of the Way (1032-3).

Here, Matthiessen uses the word nebulous, which encapsulates the struggle of not only translating texts into another language to clarify what they mean, but even of translating experiences, which is why Matthiessen added this endnote. Matthiessen discusses Sanskrit, and how this ancient language is also disputed amongst Hindus and Buddhists, comparing Sanskrit terms and their nebulousness to the well known symbol of the ouroboros - this symbol is not of ancient Buddhism but originating, etymologically, through ancient Greek.[14] The essence of what Matthiessen is trying to say, however, can again be understood through the important cog of his thought that 'mere words remain.' Mere words remain of these ancient thoughts, though Matthiessen adds this endnote and provides explicit clarity to the Sanskrit ideas, but the practice itself is the substance to live by, not the words. In this passage in particular, Matthiessen is referring to *samadhi*. *Samadhi* relates to meditation and concentration, and can be considered part of the last factor, or element of the Eightfold Path. Understood more broadly, it includes "a one-pointed state of the mind … self-collectedness, [it] has as its characteristic mark the absence

[14] The Ancient Greeks did not conceive of this ancient symbol first, however. The earliest example of an ouroboros symbol is linked to the tomb of Tutankhamen, dating to the 13th century (Bekhrad).

of wandering, of distraction… and as its concomitants, calmness, or wisdom… and ease" (qtd. in Coomaraswamy, 147-48).

Matthiessen concludes the passage with the idea of unity and reciprocity, by stating that all aspects of the circle are 'conditioned by each of the others.' He clarifies, however, that all of these states or conditions are naturally present in meditation, the last factor of the Eightfold Path, part of *samadhi*. According to Matthiessen, meditation is the way to practice all aspects of spiritual cultivation: it is the Path, it is the Way, it is, as the title of this subsection states: an *opening*.

Moving back to the impetus behind the endnote in the actual text of *The Snow Leopard*, it is clear that Matthiessen was discussing experiences, planetary experiences amongst mostly pre-industrialized humans, to be precise. In the passage that contained this endnote, Matthiessen discussed the various experiences of a Bushman, an Eskimo, a dervish, a Pueblo dancer, and Hindus and Buddhists. He brings up these people as examples of people who 'intuit the true nature of existence,' and this is at the very heart of meditation.

> The entranced Bushman staring into fire, the Eskimo using a sharp rock to draw an ever-deepening circle into the flat surface of a stone achieves the same obliteration of the ego (and the same power) as the dervish or the Pueblo sacred dancer. Among Hindus and Buddhists, realization is attained through inner stillness, usually achieved through the samadhi state of sitting yoga (Matthiessen, 300).

Matthiessen here is saying that meditation is not the de facto way to live, but it is a keystone of the Buddhist practices of living that he is studying. One can also gain meditative perspectives - in this particular passage Matthiessen writes of the 'obliteration of the ego' - simply by gazing at the primordial phenomenon that is a fire. If the reader returns to the anecdote of Matthiessen on the bow of the ship, and the achieving of unity, it becomes a sort of *samadhi* in that time and place. These are moments that are imprinted in a time and place - an Eskimo meditatively carving a circle into a stone, for example. We could think of this as the realization that there are multiple doors or portals through which one can attain the same understanding, or enlightenment. Matthiessen, in *The Snow Leopard,* has chosen meditation as his main portal to enter and practice, one which he cannot perfect, but one which he consistently shows up to practice. He is

also saying that the ways we humans have of explaining these phenomena, or ways of being, are inadequate. How could a Bushman expect to distill his experience of 'staring into fire' into words? The words are not the fire, the words are not the experience, and the words are nebulous: "he whose reflective pure spirit sinks into Atman/Knows bliss inexpressible through words" (Upanishads, qtd. in Hesse, 19).

Another example of Matthiessen sourcing the concept of *opening* comes from the *Westward* section, when he brings up a Vedic idea of desire signifying a lack of something, which disallows desire from a life of higher purpose.[15] This fits in with the second Noble Truth of Arising, of desire, and of *clearing*, recalling the second pillar of Matthiessen's meditative practice. Matthiessen follows the Vedic idea with a shift towards Buddhist thought, through Sakyamuni's belief in intense meditation, which opens the mind into a higher place - a place which can take on any number of verbal descriptions depending on the spiritual or religious context, as well as the linguistic framing used, but one place of particular resonance which Matthiessen frames is a place of the 'unsentimental embrace of all existence':

> The Vedas already included the idea that mortal desire—since it implies lack—had 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. Sakyamuni's 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 (Matthiessen, 101).

This passage strengthens the argument that Matthiessen's utmost aim in his meditation is to achieve an *opening*, and realistically, Matthiessen is sourcing this material from the founder of Buddhism himself, Sakyamuni, along with all of the other sources he uses and references throughout the book.

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[15] Vedic texts are old Sanskrit texts that informed the religion of Hinduism (https://www.ancient.eu/The_Vedas/).

To summarize this last section of *opening* as related to the fourth Noble Truth: the fourth Truth of the Path dovetails into the Eightfold Path, which itself includes in its final factor *Right Meditation*, which is what Matthiessen has been open about pursuing as his, and potentially *the* true Way. Matthiessen's *opening* pillar is indebted to the sources he quotes throughout *The Snow Leopard*, along with the actual transcriptions of the meditative acts themselves. In Buddhism, it is impossible not to encounter the idea of opening when discussed in relation to Paths or Ways, but in this chapter it is used to specifically prop up the final segment of Matthiessen's meditative practice. In the *Prologue*, Matthiessen makes it clear that Zen Buddhism is what he became a student of. Saying this again is a reminder that there are many strands to follow in spiritual practices, but the one informing Matthiessen's meditative practice is Zen, as seen in the following quote:

> The traditional founder of Ch'an Buddhism (in Japan, Zen) was Bodhidharma, a great teacher in the apostolic line of Sakyamuni, who carried the teaching from India to China in A.D. 527. Perhaps influenced by the simplicity of the Chinese philosophy called Tao (the Way), the fierce 'blue-eyed monk,' or 'wall-gazer,' exhorted his followers to ignore the sectarian disputes, ponderous scriptures, proliferating icons, and priestly trappings of organized religion and return to the intense meditation that had opened the Buddha's Path (149).

This quote, from the *Westward* section, finds its way into the readers' mind early on in the book, which is important in that section of the book for laying down the preliminary thrust of what is the heart of Matthiessen's journey: continually returning to meditation, whether it is always intense or not, whether it is good or not, it is a continual return to the practice. The person who sits down to meditation may be on a continually evolving path, never the same as the day they sat before. In the moment of meditation, they are always the same and equal: they are returning, to which they are opening - they are opening themselves to the practice, and they are opening themselves to the Way.

3.8 Opening Outward: One Day I Shall Meditate In Falling Snow

> Now the mountains all around me take on life; the Crystal Mountain moves. Soon there comes the murmur of the torrent, from far away below under the ice: it seems impossible that I can hear this sound. Even in windlessness, the sound of rivers comes and goes and falls and rises, like the wind itself. An instinct comes to open outward by letting all life in, just as a flower fills with sun. To burst forth from this old husk and cast one's energy abroad, to fly. . . (637).

Matthiessen observes rivers, and the sound of rivers in this passage from *At Crystal Mountain* - rivers often being a metaphor in Buddhist thinking as referenced in the first chapter, "as in the morning river that appears the same as the river of the night before, now passed away" (103). Matthiessen then moves his thought to *opening*. One technique used in meditation is when the meditator breathes in all of the molecules and atoms of the world outside, symbolically of course, but literally filling the hollow space Matthiessen spoke of: "all life depends on breathing" (Buksbazen, 57). The meditator then breathes all of the molecules and atoms from the inside, out. Ives documents this type of breathing:

> feel your breath come in, bringing fresh air, full of oxygen that is being offered by the larches, cedars, and mountain laurel around you. Feel the air slowly leave your nostrils. Extend your outbreath slightly until your lungs are empty. Offer up the carbon dioxide to the plants around you (Ives, 59).

This can be done with eyes open or closed, but it is a powerful tool to infuse the meditator with a sense of unity with the world, to help understand the boundaries between self and world - the self as an object, and the world as another set of objects that are encountered by the self. This idea gets slightly nebulous when the idea of self is challenged in Buddhist thought, and by Matthiessen himself, as an illusory concept: is there a Self? Regardless of a Self or not, for the purpose of this chapter, we can be sure that there is a meditator. Matthiessen is the meditator, and he can open up through meditative practice - opening outward like the natural objects Matthiessen encounters along his journey.

After Matthiessen's opening outward, like a 'sun-filled flower,' he illuminates in the very next paragraph another interesting aspect of meditation: emotion: "although I am not conscious of emotion, the mind-opening brings a soft mist to my eyes. Then the mist passes, the cold wind

clears my head, and body-mind comes and goes on the light air. A sun-filled Buddha. One day I shall meditate in falling snow" (Matthiessen, 638). Matthiessen states that he is not conscious of emotion during this meditative experience, though it is in fact an actual meditation session - in the passages before he described his sitting place and his regulated breathing. Matthiessen's non-consciousness of emotion, though, poses an interesting line of inquiry in regards to unity of mind and body, and also a clearing away of emotion. Certain meditations, perhaps more at the beginner levels, teach the meditator to be aware of what is going on in their mind, but from a perspective that does not bind itself to what is happening in the mind - thoughts or emotions both included. When Matthiessen writes about being like a flower, opening up to the sun, or being 'a sun-filled Buddha', he is taking the Zen approach: "in Zen, one seeks to empty out the mind, to return it to the clear, pure stillness of a seashell or a flower petal" (300). By emptying out the mind, of suffering, of unsatisfactoriness - the Truth of Suffering -, it clears the way for a possible absence of thought and emotion. As Matthiessen documents in his experience, this absence of thought and emotion also must necessarily lose a possibility in the process: if the meditator is emptying emotion and thought, or in Matthiessen's words, "scoured clean of intellect, emotions, and the senses, may be laid open to the experience that individual existence, ego, the 'reality' of matter and phenomena are no more than fleeting and illusory arrangements of molecules," (300-1), then the meditator is losing the ability to understand the emotions, to comprehend how their emotions arise in them certain thoughts, acts, and behaviors, because they are trading that off, in Zen, and in Matthiessen's practice, for a different goal of attainment: an *opening*, an opening to pure experience.

An example of how Matthiessen delicately transcribes this attainment is when his 'mind-opening brings a soft mist to the eyes.' What he is doing here is becoming the flower, or any other object in nature grounded in pure being. Matthiessen's eyes, through the opening of body-mind, are not being described by the sensory abilities we normally attribute to the eyes, which fits in with Matthiessen's scouring of the senses line. He is not describing what his eyes see in terms of objects they perceive, whether they be objects in nature, colors or shades of the environment around him, but rather he is describing his eyes by the 'soft mist' that arrives, like the sun filling a flower. This is an example of a moment where Matthiessen achieves his *opening*

goal of attainment, but he is careful to note that ‘matter and phenomena are no more than fleeting and illusory arrangements of molecules,’ so his attainment is a moment of soft mist, a dew that dries in the sun - no matter, one day Matthiessen shall meditate in the falling snow.

3.9 All Is In Flux

“[W]e stand in the thickened middle of a sensuous flux, at the juncture not only of materiality and imagination but at the conjuncture of an undomesticated primordial ‘plasma’” (Desmond, qtd. in Zapf, 178-9).

What is meditation to Matthiessen? Is it being wholly present to all the existent phenomena surrounding him? Is meditation the opportunity to explore a space within himself, a daily and dedicated occasion to withdraw from focused sensory being-ness, in order to become present, where Matthiessen can ‘scarcely breathe at all’ because he is completely engaged with his practice?

Matthiessen’s exploration of meditation is not linear, nor should it be, and it has already been shown that there are subtle contradictions and discrepancies within his words. In the *meditation place* passage, readers should understand that Matthiessen has “set out binoculars in case wild creatures should happen into view” (Matthiessen, 637). These words clue us in to the constant pull of the phenomenological aspect of Matthiessen’s mind. In *The Snow Leopard*, Matthiessen is dedicated as a writer of words, to record faithfully what he sees and perceives in the naturalist worlds he encounters. We should be wary of how this intellectual hunger might possibly interfere with, as well as bolster, his meditative pursuits. If his binoculars are placed beside him, can he be fully present within his meditation practice? What does it mean to be fully present? If Matthiessen sees the tracks of a wolf, how does he sense “the silver beasts had skirted the frozen dwellings, under the waning moon” (781) while staying engaged to his meditative practice? When Matthiessen hears the screech of a mile-high lammergeier, “the great lammergeier comes, gold-headed and black-collared, a nine-foot blade sweeping down out of the north it passes into the shadows between cliffs” (365),

will he surface from his meditation to use a technological tool to closer perceive the fauna? Would this act bring him closer to nature, and the phenomena around him, while pulling him away from his meditation practice?

> All phenomena are processes, connections, all is in flux, and at moments this flux is actually visible: one has only to open the mind in meditation or have the mind screens knocked awry by drugs or dreams to see that there is no real edge to anything, that in the endless interpenetration of the universe, a molecular flow, a cosmic energy shimmers in all stone and steel as well as flesh (231).

The process, or the fluctuation of phenomena and its sensory availability, according to Matthiessen, is possible to glean through a select number of methods, most stable among them is through the use of meditation. *All is in flux*, but what is this flux? Flux, etymologically classified from Latin, meaning to flow (Merriam-Webster), signifies that Matthiessen sees the world in constant motion. Looking deeper into this, Matthiessen does not see an edge to this flux: 'there is no real edge to anything.' Matthiessen may see and perceive the hard edges of a mountain ridgeline, or the ephemeral edges of the passing phenomena of clouds, but inherent in our ongoing interpretations of the universe we are apart of, according to Matthiessen, is an inability to grasp definitive boundaries. Similarly, Morton argues that "... a Buddhist meditator is supposed to hold, if only for her progress along the path, that a mountain might not be a mountain" (Morton, 528). Perhaps it is this *unlocatability* of the definitiveness of material objects that Matthiessen sits with when he is meditating.

There is also the cosmic energy Matthiessen speaks of, shimmering in all things, whether organic or inorganic, which is an important point to locate for this passage because it serves to *undelineate* phenomena in the universe: *the mountains are, the sun is round*, but the boots are also stiff, "because my boots feel stiff and small" (130), and the synthetic packs, "GS is discoursing happily on the freedom of carrying one's own pack" (362), are also existent, just as the mountains are. There is a non-hierarchy to the phenomena of the world, according to Matthiessen, in this passage. To reach this non-hierarchy, Matthiessen guides us to fold our legs, and regulate our breath, until we can hardly breathe at all.

Keeping in mind the flux of phenomena, and the lack of an edge to anything that

Matthiessen speaks of, there is a passage early on in the *Northward* section, about a week after the flux passage in the text's chronological trajectory, that simultaneously cements the idea of a world in flux, while also opening up a possible contradiction:

> The emptiness and silence of snow mountains quickly bring about those states of consciousness that occur in the mind-emptying of meditation, and no doubt high altitude has an effect, for my eye perceives the world as fixed or fluid, as it wishes. The earth twitches, and the mountains shimmer, as if all molecules had been set free: the blue sky rings. Perhaps what I hear is the 'music of the spheres,' what Hindus call the breathing of the Creator and astrophysicists the 'sighing' of the sun (342).

Matthiessen perceives, through the sensory field of his eyes, a world that can be *fixed or fluid*, depending on the seemingly autonomous functionality of his eyes, as they wish. The fluidity Matthiessen speaks of is not difficult for the reader to grasp, as it logically follows that if a world is in constant flux, then the phenomena we encounter should remain in a state of fluidity. Zapf makes a claim towards this fluidity, that "the indissoluble interconnectedness and dynamic feedback relations between culture and nature, mind and matter, text and life… remains aware of the fluid and ever-shifting but nevertheless real differences and boundaries that have emerged within and between them" (Zapf, 86). Matthiessen struggled to grasp boundaries, whereas Zapf claims a fluidity which cannot ignore the emergence of them within the commingling of 'culture and nature, mind and matter, text and life'.

3.10 Intuiting the True Nature of Existence

"The purpose of Zen is to be a cicada! Every exhalation, *b-z-z-z!* Every exhalation Mu! So-called quiet sitting is not enough - stone Buddhas can do that! It must be *live* zazen!" (Basho, qtd. in Matthiessen, "Dragon River", 41)

Radiating outward from the understanding of the universe being in flux, in molecular flow, we come to one of the most explicit and direct examples, in the *Northward* section of *TSL*, of what meditation is to Matthiessen:

> Meditation has nothing to do with contemplation of eternal questions, or of one's own folly, or even of one's navel, although a clearer view on all of these enigmas may result. It has nothing to do with thought of any kind—with anything at all, in fact, but intuiting the true nature of existence, which is why it has appeared, in one form or another, in almost every culture known to man (Matthiessen, 299).

From this perspective, there is a concrete intellectual boundary around what Matthiessen is pursuing in his meditation: 'intuiting the true nature of existence.' Matthiessen is aware of the byproducts of meditation - the possible pondering of weighty and timeless questions, or understanding our physical selves more clearly, but he states that meditation 'has nothing to do with thought,' which is why it requires intuition, intuiting. Our intuition, though, is not to be let loose on any subject material or physical phenomena. Matthiesen is explicit, in this passage, that the purpose of meditation is to feel our way to an understanding of existence. He backs this up with the claim that 'intuiting the true nature of existence' has appeared in most human cultures. This 'true nature of existence' is something fundamental to different Buddhist branches.

If the reader recalls the passage from D.T. Suzuki in the introduction to this chapter, a discrepancy between the master Zen practitioner and Matthiessen arises: "Zen perceives or feels, and does not abstract nor meditate. Zen penetrates and is finally lost in the immersion. Meditation, on the other hand, is outspokenly dualistic and consequently inevitably superficial" (Suzuki, 42). There would be nothing superficial at all to Matthiessen about his practice of meditation, a practice which grasps through the faculty of intuition, but does not abstract towards anything. To Matthiessen, the intuition is prescribed by the classic metaphor of the heart, again referring back to a previous passage: "I understand all this, not in my mind but in my heart, knowing how meaningless it is to try to capture what cannot be expressed" (Matthiessen, 639). Matthiessen is not intellectually attempting, in his meditations, to think through the fundamental nature of existence - he is relying on his heart, as a metaphor for the intuitive capabilities humans possess.

There is one question that is difficult to answer: how is intuiting the true nature of existence not in itself a contemplation of eternal questions? Can the act of intuiting not be considered contemplation? Are mere words insufficient to properly represent the idea of

intuiting?

Matthiessen cracks the facade of existence in turns throughout *The Snow Leopard*, as is the case in this passage from the *Northward* section: “this stillness to which all returns, this is reality, and soul and sanity have no more meaning here than a gust of snow; such transience and insignificance are exalting, terrifying, all at once, like the sudden discovery, in meditation, of one’s own transparence” (Matthiessen, 541). The ‘stillness’ that Matthiessen refers to harks back to his interpretation of the mountains: “they simply exist...they are meaning. The mountains are.” A loose pack of snow blown by shifting winds is no more or less meaningful, or existent, than Matthiessen himself, a discovery that illuminates the non-hierarchy transience of human beings, one Schaller also discovered. Matthiessen receives this insight, as he claims, in his meditative practice. It is an act of intuiting, for that is the only real purpose of meditation, according to him.

Zapf stakes a claim for his literature as cultural ecology theory that is just as applicable to Matthiessen’s practice of meditation: “human culture and consciousness have evolved from but cannot be reduced to matter and bodily natures: they are matter or nature becoming self-aware” (Zapf, 86). After the reader has waded through this chapter’s theoretical analyses of Matthiessen’s practice of meditation, the final word must rest with the author himself:

> All worldly pursuits have but the one unavoidable and inevitable end, which is sorrow: acquisitions end in dispersion; buildings, in destruction; meetings, in separation; births, in death. Knowing this, one should from the very first renounce acquisition and heaping-up, and building and meeting, and . . . set about realizing the Truth. . . . Life is short, and the time of death is uncertain; so apply yourselves to meditation” (Matthiessen, 298-299).

Chapter 4: Conclusion

"For us, who are invested in both Buddhism and critical theory, we want to begin to answer these questions in the following way: a serious engagement with Buddhism can take many forms, from obvious ones (such as scrupulous historical research or daily meditation practice) to ones that look nothing like Buddhism at all. The threshold of 'seriousness,' therefore, is whether or not such thinking and practices open up to Buddhist principles, and can productively push and be pushed by them" (Boon, Cazdyn, Morton, 25).

"It is not the phenomenon of climate change as such but its textual and literary representations which can mobilize this critical and creative energy. Climate change and other phenomena in the more-than-human ecosphere can only become a deconstructive force in its cultural transformation in texts" (Zapf, 265).

As this thesis has tried to argue through an engagement with Peter Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard*, and the supplementary inclusion of George Schaller's *Stones of Silence*, there is a tension and fundamental difference between Eastern and Western thought, as well as Eastern and Western practices. The Eastern practice of meditation belongs to an opposite polarity from the Western scientific practice of observing, analyzing, and taxonomizing. With the current globalization and spread of information, a truly interconnected world has emerged, and scientists from all disciplines are struggling to understand how they can use their analytical research to create awareness around climate change that will lead to sustainable and effective political action. With the Paris Agreement fraying due to political friction, centering around increasingly inward turning political figures using their diplomatic power and seat of attention to bolster their own countries fortunes, the natural world is in a state of unequivocally dire peril, pitted between antagonistic leaders who cannot see the larger pictures of their global environment.[16] These leaders are not listening to the counsel of science, and instead turning backwards, to an imagined

[16] The Paris Agreement brought together 196 parties whose "central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change" (UNFCCC).

time of prosperity that neglects the climate effects of the industrial machines that drove the world into a new era decades ago. New directions in scholarly inquiries have turned to different fields attempting to grapple with this changing state of affairs, and the environmental humanities is one such corridor of academia that is receiving welcome funding to pursue new perspectives, and new collaborations in an interdisciplinary venture that has at its core belief the study of how humans interact with our environment: "these are not just academic or technical matters... these are fundamental questions of defining what our human community is and how it should exist" (Brulle, *Agency, Democracy*, 48, quoted in *Literature and the Environment*).

In Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard,* the author grappled with the same questions we are struggling to enact political action for today. Matthiessen's focus inhabited a fluid space between the intersection of Eastern and Western thought. It is through this fluid relationship that answers can be found to a better way of understanding and engaging with our environment, in order to perceive directly our relation to nature. Science is a necessary pole of this intersection, and between science and Eastern ways of thought, or "the difficult area between scientific knowledge and immediate perception" (Clark, 10), there exists a potentiality of a more sustainably imagined future.

In Matthiessen's exploration of Buddhism, he lets the reader in on wisdom that has been washed away in the pursuit of modern life. Zapf quotes Macauley in a way that draws in an engagement with Buddhism: "we are well advised to listen to this ancient wisdom although it may speak to us through a foreign language, another era, or a different set of concerns" (Macauley, qtd. in Zapf 178). Though real political action has been enacted towards climate change, it is also possible that the individuals who hold the power to create the change are not impressed by scientific data that is presented to them. Human emotions, biases and subjective reasoning have proven to be forces against scientific change, and have created a barrier to accept a change in the direction of a new climate aware reckoning. Eastern thought, to many modern Westerners, inhabits a land of subjectivity that exists in a cloud of mysticism that it dwells in, yet Eastern thought is also apprehensive of scientific apparatuses:

> The power of such a mountain is so great and yet so subtle that, without compulsion, people are drawn to it from near and far, as if by the force of some invisible magnet; and

> they will undergo untold hardships and privations in their inexplicable urge to approach and to worship the centre of this sacred power. . . . This worshipful or religious attitude is not impressed by scientific facts, like figures of altitude, which are foremost in the mind of modern man. Nor is it motivated by the urge to 'conquer' the mountain. . . . (Govinda, quoted in Matthiessen, 567).

Matthiessen quotes Govinda to illustrate what is lost in modernistic life: a return to nature as a place of worship, a religious attitude that is grounded in secularity, yet can be informed by Eastern ways of thought. The emotions and biases that are quickly catapulting world powers into political action turning away from the climate crisis represent a divorce from the worship of nature. The origin of humanity's roots have become so distant, and the relationship to our environment so perverted, that the facts of science no longer hold narrative power for certain political administrations. The following headline leaves no doubt as to the state of the environment in current political hands: "the Trump administration on Monday finalized its plan to open up part of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to oil and gas development, a move that overturns six decades of protections for the largest remaining stretch of wilderness in the United States" (Plumer and Fountain, *NYTimes*). The failure of science to gather convincing political momentum in the tide of change for our planet has opened up the possibility of a new way: the way of opening Westerners to a cultural reboot that incorporates Eastern ways of perceiving the world. This change is not textual material that can be placed on A4 documents, but it is spiritual nourishment that is now trending, as the plethora of apps related to mindfulness and meditation can exhibit. Matthiessen's engagement with meditation in *The Snow Leopard* showed a dedication and focus in a remote land that is nearly impossible to replicate. His diligent study of Buddhist texts, at the peril of his porters' backs from the weight of the books, opened up dialogues on insights to life that would also be difficult to achieve in the modern trappings of human life. What Matthiessen showed throughout *The Snow Leopard*, though, is that a return to nature through Buddhism can be found, and that there is no theoretical difference between the human and simple organic materialities such as a white down feather or sheep dung:

> The ground whirls with its own energy, not in an alarming way but in slow spiral, and at these altitudes, in this vast space and silence, that energy pours through me, joining my

> body with the sun until small silver breaths of cold, clear air, no longer mine, are lost in the mineral breathing of the mountain. A white down feather, sun-filled, dances before me on the wind: alighting nowhere, it balances on a shining thorn, goes spinning on. Between this white feather, sheep dung, light, and the fleeting aggregate of atoms that is 'I,' there is no particle of difference. There is a mountain opposite, but this "I" is opposite nothing, opposed to nothing (695).

Humans are embedded within a more-than-human world, and the implications of a binary way of thinking between Eastern and Western thought pose great dangers for the future of our planet:

> This conversation is not intended to end, but rather to begin or, at any rate, to make explicit what has been ongoing in Western thought since the skeptical engagement with Buddhism in Greek philosophy… in direct relation to this urgent moment within the global transition from modernity to whatever comes next. We seek to restore to (Western) theory its repressed underside, in the name of increasing that phenomenon variously called consciousness, critique, and struggle" (Boon, Cazdyn, Morton, 48-49).

The final call to a newly imagined future rests in the *mere words* of Matthiessen: "I meditate for the last time on this mountain that is bare, though others all around are white with snow. Like the bare peak of the koan, this one is not different from myself. I know this mountain because I am this mountain, I can feel it breathing at this moment, as its grass tops stray against the snows" (771). Matthiessen is going further than Aldo Leopold's famous line "thinking like a mountain" (Leopold, qtd. in Ives, 59), to what Ives suggests: "on a hike try sitting like a mountain" (59). Whether or not Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard* continuously circulates as a sustainable text with a sustainably imagined future, Western readers can journey along the spectrum of Western thought to Eastern thought, advised to '[sit] like a mountain', or feel the mountain breathing, to understand our embeddedness within a more-than-human planetary engagement.

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