Snow leopard . . .

Continued from Page 8

He next took the path toward the garden of Zen with Deborah Love-"lovely in person and in spirit, a gifted writer and wonderful teacher with a passionate, inquiring mind, exceptionally intelligent and kind," she became his second wife. For years now they had been spiritually tutored by Soen Roshi, a Budhist master working in Vermont to whom this book is dedicated.

But with the sensual noise that accompanies an active life in the West with its cultural predispositions Zen can best be only a hobby and never a real sensitivity to life and time. Matthiessen treks into the mountains with the desire-though desire is a first sin in Buddhism-to turn his soul to OM, cosmic resonance, and lay to rest in his mind

Deborah's death in 1975 of cancer.

Matthiessen finds, and loses and reloses, the wisdom of invisible ego on his quiet, perilous journey with Schaller. His spiritual experiences are subdued, and written of humbly in the Snow Leopard; he is not pontific and does not moralize. He pares down his prose with guarded Western empiricism-he cannot convert his nature. "To strive for permanence in what I think I have experienced is to miss the point."

His Buddhist trip is not a manifest to the right way. If nothing more it is a metaphor that successfully translates his sensations on the journey into biological terre incognito.

Implicit parallelism

Much of the parallelism is simply implicit in the rich lore he recites-of the Himalayas, and the psychologically mysterious natives, the decrepit and the divine, their alien roles, their anachronistic tribalism, the history of the people and the local religions and myths, and the unexplainable likeness of spiritual intuitions throughout the world and time and knowledge.

Matthiessen and Schaller part ways on the descent from Inner Dolpo. A snow leopard crosses Schaller's path. Matthiessen glimpses a red-black creature vanishing behind a rock and thinks of yeti; but he never sees the leopard. Tibet remains like a koan, an unsolvable riddle given by

one's teacher.

"I am not ready to let go," he said, "and so I shall not resolve my koan, or see the snow leopard, that is to say, perceive it. If a snow leopard should leap from the rock above and manifest itself before me-then in a moment of pure fright, out of my wits, I might truly perceive it, and be free.

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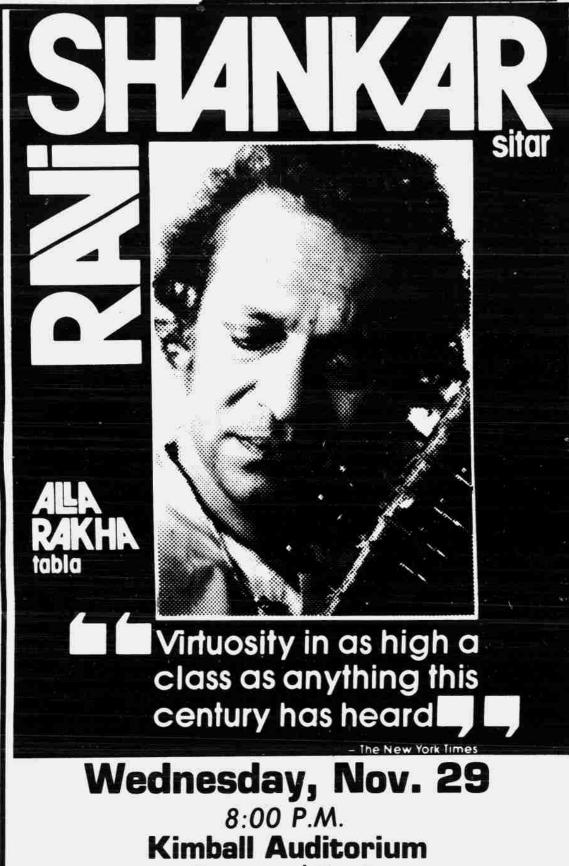
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