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Peter Matthiessen
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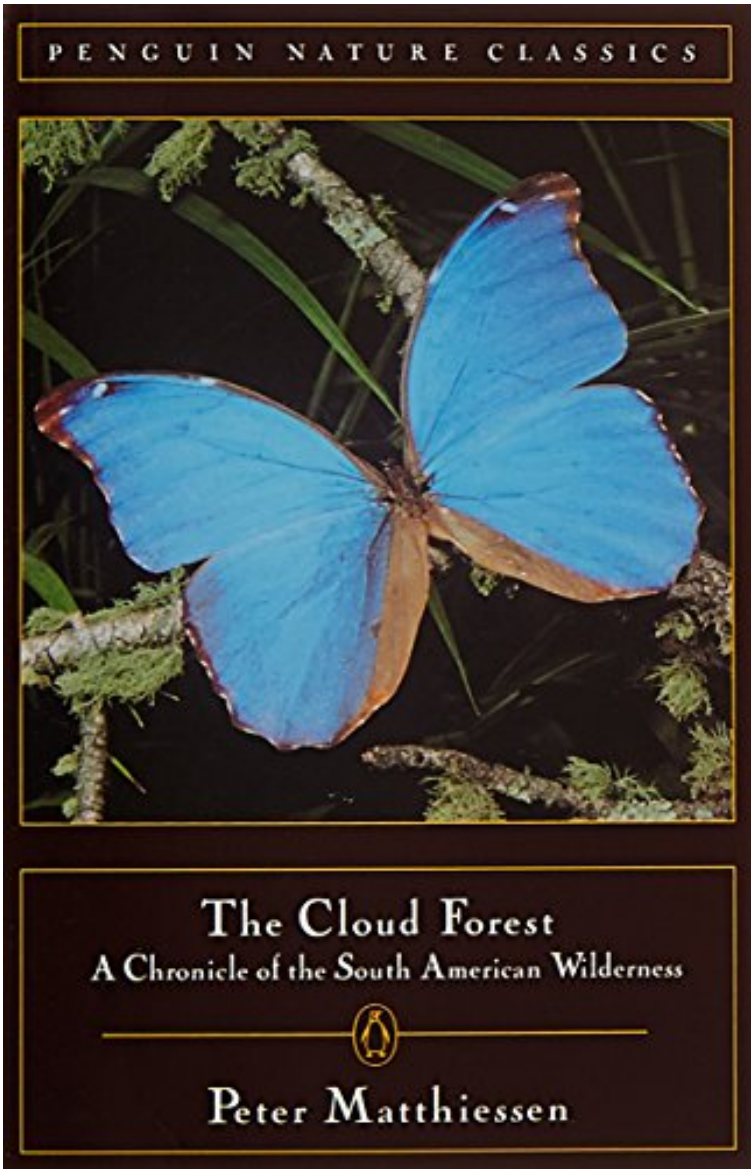

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#553604 in Books Peter Matthiessen 1987-01-06 1987-01-06Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 7.80 x .60 x 5.10l, .48 #File Name: 0140255079288 pagesCloud Forest A Chronicle of the South American Wilderness | File size: 69.Mb

Peter Matthiessen : Cloud Forest: A Chronicle of the South American Wilderness before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cloud Forest: A Chronicle of the South American Wilderness:

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review helpful. ian and Altiplano TravelogueBy George C. J. Fleck III bought this book because, having extensively traveled in Peru and horse-packed in the Peruvian Andes, I was interested in what the book had to say. Although the book was written 24 years before I first went to Peru, it was interesting to see how little had changed in those ensuing years. Not having been in the basin, I cannot speak to Peter Matthiesen's observations about the Indian tribes in the area, although I detected a lot of "gringo" condescension on his part. I flat out disagree with his characterizations of the "altiplano" indians, finding them warm, humorous and interested in "turistas" and travelers. The young children are amazing! They have no creature comforts, tend llamas, alpacas, and spin wool at the tender age of three or four, yet have the most beautiful smiles and natures! Peter Matthiesen is obviously a expert, dedicated birdwatcher, and naturalist, detailing many of his sightings. Matthiesen's encounters with Peruvian "artful dodgers" are well told and his many travails, particularly on the Urabamba river are exciting.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A great travel journalBy LeeAnn HeringerThe writing is so beautiful and so full of a sense of place, it pulls you along. The descriptions are startling and poetic and he seems to be always scanning the horizon for birds and butterflies and flowers. Even the most desolate places he travels through seem to be filled with creatures and visions. Even Allen Ginsberg makes a surprise appearance.If only I wrote like this, I would quit my day job and be on the first cargo ship out of here.

A classic work of nature and humanity, by renowned writer Peter Matthiessen (1927-2014), author of the National Book Award-winning The Snow Leopard and the new novel In Paradise Peter Matthiessen crisscrossed 20,000 miles of the South American wilderness, from the Amazon rain forests to Machu Picchu, high in the Andes, down to Tierra del Fuego and back. He followed the trails of old explorers, encountered river bandits, wild tribesmen, and the evidence of ancient ruins, and discovered fossils in the depths of the Peruvian jungle. Filled with observations and descriptions of the people and the fading wildlife of this vast world to the south, The Cloud Forest is his incisive, wry report of his expedition into some of the last and most exotic wild terrains in the world.For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

About the AuthorPeter Matthiessen was the cofounder of The Paris and is the author of numerous works of nonfiction, including In the Spirit of Crazy Horse, Indian Country, and The Snow Leopard, winner of the National Book Award.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.1. SARGASSO SEA AND SOUTHWARDNovember 20.A PALE NOVEMBER SKY, like a sky on the moon. The M.S. Venimos is scheduled to sail at three p.m., but freighters rarely leave anywhere on time, and it is 20:32 in the evening by the ships clock when a stevedore on the Brooklyn pier lets the last hawser slap into the water. All gone aft, he bawlsincongruously, for he is wearing a fedoraand shoves his hands into his pockets. There is a nine-mile wind out of the northwest, sharp as ice. The man retraces his steps along the darkened pier without glancing at the ship again. She is warped swiftly from her berth by the tug Isabel A. McAllister, which remains fastened alongside until the ship has cleared the Erie Basin. To starboard lies Governors Island, and behind it the bright night walls of Manhattan, soaring up out of the black harbor like the Seven Cities of Cibola.Now the tug is gone, and there comes a sense of uncertainty, of loss. This is not entirely homesickness; a continuity has been broken with the desertion of that tug, as if life must now start up all over again. On a long journey the first port left behind is the memorable one, and the sense of parting cannot help but be intensified by the scope and light of New York Harbor after dark as seen from the stern of a ship sliding outward toward the Narrows. Nearby a bell buoy rings quietly, the sound strangely penetrating against the night sounds of the city.Staten Island looms to starboard, and to port the shore parkway flickers along Gravesend Bay. The green, red, and white running lights of harbor craft, and night fires on the Jersey shore. The Venimos sounds two blasts of her whistle: a larger ship is overtaking and passes finally to port. In the outer harbor other freighters, anchored, hang suspended on the faint reflections from the shore.9:45. The lights of Brooklyn widen, fall astern, and the Jersey lights stretch out, marking off great areas of blackness. We are nearing Sandy Hook.The Narrows, Gravesend, Sandy Hook, the Ambrose Lightship, the Atlanticwonderful names, sea names. The night sky overcast, and the night wind damp and raw. Even before I fell asleep the ship had commenced that subtle quake which meant that the long swells of the open sea had taken hold of her. She is bound up the for Peru by way of Bermuda, the Sargasso Sea, the Windward Islands and Barbados, Trinidad, British Guiana, and Brazilian ports along the river. My own destination is less precisethe rain forest and the Andean sierra, Mato Grosso and Tierra del Fuego. The very names evoke so much, and are their own justification for this journey, for one must hurry if one is still to glimpse the earths last wild terrains. The greatest of these, the oceans and Antarctica excepted, lie not in Africa but within the mysterious continent of South America.November 21.At eight this morning, over one hundred miles from land, there were ten herring gulls still with us, and at nine-thirty there were, astonishingly, three times that many. The birds sail forward on the ships air currents, coast across the cargo booms on the long foredeck, and slide away astern, where they stroke along resignedly in the

wake. It interests me that all of them are birds in their second year, not yet in full adult plumageas if the adults knew when and where to gain their living more easily. Undoubtedly the new birds were attracted to our wake by breakfast slops, but where they could have come from is a mystery, unless we drew them from some passing ship where the pickings had proved lean. I saw no ship, however, and I have been on deck all morning; while a gulls vision is considerably better than my own, it cannot see over the horizon.The water is turning a deep blue, with an increase in chop though the wind is steady, as if we were entering the Gulf Stream. But there are no signs as yet of the Gulf Streams floating weed, and the air remains quite cold.The Venimos rolls smoothly through the chop, by all signs an able ocean-going vessel. She is a small freighter of 1308 gross tons, built in Hamburg in 1956, her registered home port Hamilton, Bermuda. Her length is 265 feet, hull gray, superstructure white. The crew is twenty-five in numberthirteen Brazilian seamen, three Peruvian stewards, a chief engineer who is Welsh, and two Scots engineers (the Malays and Lascars hatching dark, mutinous stratagems in the focsle may be missingindeed, the focsle itself is missing; the crew is quartered below decks in the poop house aftbut surely the Scotsmen in the engine room are in the grand old tradition of British seafaring); the captain, three mates, radio officer (known as Sparks, of course), and fourth engineer are English. There are two passengers besides myself: a missionary of the New Tribes Mission, returning to the Brazilian interior, and a Lebanese with a Turkish passport, journeying to Belm on business. Both are agreeable companions, though the latter sleeps most of the day. In fair weather he appears now and then on deck, garbed in bazaar blues and yellows and black harem slippers. Truly he is the ageless merchant of the Levant, tired and tireless, homeless and resigned, probing the world on his joyless caravanserai.* * *The wind has freshened all day long and is now coming out of the southeast at over twenty-five miles per hour. This is a crosswind on the Gulf Stream, which we entered in mid-afternoon, and in consequence the sea has become rough. The sky, dimly overcast all day, with cirrus clouds in heavy ranks on the horizon, is austere and ominous with its signs of changing weatherand weather change at sea is invariably impressive, the ship seeming to shrink in size under the vast engulfing sky. Some of the gulls have dropped away, whether homeward or to another ship one cannot tell. The restI count nineteen at dusksweep silently up and down the wake or hang on the sky above the taffrail. Now and then they utter high, small, wintry cries, quite unlike the summer yawps so familiar along the coast. Two pelagic birds appear but keep their distancea swift jaeger and a great skua, hulking along across the gathering waves.This is only the first day out, with forty left to go, for a radiogram has come, and the freighter has been rerouted: before proceeding to the Windward Islands she must work west again to Haiti, to take on a cargo of grain meal for Barbados.November 22.In the Gulf Stream last night it was very rough indeed. Rain in brief fits, and the roar of the sea drowned out for the first time the drum and mutter of the ship. I slept badly, and around three a.m., when the sky grew strangely light, stood at the porthole for a while watching the gray monsters toiling past.By morning the herring gulls were gone, and true oceanic birds had appeared out of the wastes to take their place. All came quite close in the light rain, and I was able to identify two young kittiwakes with their lovely wing bands, as well as a number of the so-called sea hawkspomarine jaegers and their larger relatives, a pair of great skuas. These flew about the ship for several hours until about mid-morning, when all vanished. We are nearing the southerly limits of the skua and the kittiwake, and it is not likely that these species will appear again. Already, in fact, a single frantic flying fishthe first semi-tropical creaturehas skittered off among the Gulf Stream weed patches.At 3:50 in the afternoon, on the afterdeck, a starling whirled up from astern and landed on the lifeboat davit. Wherever it may have come from, it cannot be less than four hundred miles from shore (the captain was kind enough to estimate our position at 3:50: 3527' north by 6758' west), and yet when I approached cautiously to photograph it, it flew off immediately to the westward, toward the mainland. It knows where it is bound, apparently, but where it might have come from is a mystery so strange as to be quite disturbing. I cant believe it will ever reach the land. . . .November 2324. The Bermudas.During the night we ran into the fringe of a series of gales which stretch, apparently, from southeast of Bermuda as far north as Iceland, and eastward across Europe. The swells from these storms were huge, and after two a.m. I was thrown about in my berth like a sack of custard. The day, when at last it dawned, was clear, and the great sparkling walls of blue water, some of them thirty feet and more, seemed exhilarating rather than otherwise. (Waves larger than that are awesome, however; not only are they not exhilarating, they are oppressive, even to the best of sailors. They soared by us in broad sombre ranges, with hissing white ridges, an inhospitable and subduing sight, as H. M. Tomlinson says in The Sea and the Jungle. And: The mirror of water on the iron surfaces, constantly renewed, reflected and flashed the wild lights in the sky as she rolled and pitched, and somehow these reflections from her polish made the steamer seem more desolate and forlorn. Conrad himself could not put it better than that.)The starling mystery has been renewed with the sudden appearance of this tireless bird among the cargo hatches early this morning. There is the remote possibility, of course, that two birds arrived yesterday and only one was fool enough to depart, or even that this one arrived separately, but the chances are that yesterdays bird took a good hard look at its situation (and if a bird can be hardheaded, it is certainly the squat, quarrelsome starling) and hastened back to the Venimos. In any case, the incumbent seems content to tarry here a while, fluttering busily up and down the ship or diving into a cable drum to rest. It will almost certainly disembark at Bermuda tonight, in quest of food and water. Some of the junior officers have interested themselves in its plight, or interested themselves in my interestI cannot be sure which seems to them the greater curiosity.At 10:30 this morning a lone

herring gull appeared and as quickly disappeared again, whirled away like a scrap of blown paper. We are now less than one hundred miles from land. I am keeping a weather eye out for the rare cahow, or Bermuda petrel, a bird which was thought extinct for over three hundred years before a few were discovered fifty years ago, still nesting on the islets of Castle Roads. It could appear at any time, but I am not really hopeful.We arrived at the Bermudas after dark and lay to off the south shore until dawn, when a pilot arrived to take the ship in through the reefs to the town of Saint Georges.Saint Georges is a pretty old town, and I was interested to note, at Saint Peters Church, that the Mr. W. Strachey who supplied a vivid account of the murtherings of the then very numerous cahow (in his chronicle of the wreck at the Bermudas of the Sea Venture, said to have been the source of inspiration of The Tempest) officiated at Bermudas first wedding in 1609.We left Bermuda in mid-morning, and I spent several hours on the bridge, scanning the waters, but I saw no cahow; as a matter of fact, I saw no sea bird of any description at Bermuda, though several are known to breed there.Tomorrow is Thanksgiving.November 25. Sargasso Sea.The advantage of this small, slow freighter is that its route encompasses not only the great but that trackless ocean desert known as the Sargasso Seathough now we have been rerouted and are bearing southwest to Haiti, so that we shall not traverse the place in medias res, as I had hoped, but only its western reaches.The Sargasso Sea, which we entered late last night, is an amorphous oblong at least 400 by 1000 miles in its dimensions, located approximately in that part of the Atlantic south of Bermuda and south and west of the Azores, or, more precisely, within latitudes 25 to 30 degrees north and longitudes 40 to 70 degrees west. Since it remains strangely isolated, one might almost think of it as a huge island in the mighty ocean rivers which swirl around itthe Gulf Stream to the west and north, the Canaries Current to the east, the Equatorial and the Antilles Currents to the southall these rivers set in clockwise motion by the earths rotation and impelled by the prevailing winds. In the north these are the westerlies, and in the south they are those relentless tropic breezes known as the northeast trades.The sea is named for Sargassum bacciferum, brown algae with neat clustered bladders; they collect here, according to old accounts, in quantities sufficient to entrap a sailing ship. Like most old accounts, this one is untrue. The general area is known also as the Horse Latitudes, a name which apparently derives from days when ships becalmed in these blue windless fields would be forced to heave live thirsty cargo over the side; the surface of the sea was allegedly littered at times with the bodies of dead animals.Virtually everything else one can remark about the Sargasso Sea is still a matter of dispute. Columbus, for example, was the first navigator to report it, but it has been suggested that the original discovery was made by the Phoenicians: the basis for this fascinating theory is still unknown to me. Then the origin of the sargassum weed itself remains uncertain: does it drift here from the coastal waters, or is it an indigenous pelagic plant? (It is generally agreed that Sargassum bacciferum, whatever its origins, can reproduce itself in the sea.) The weed, again, is said to swarm with littoral-type life; there is even a species of crab peculiar to it. This view is confirmed by that amazing navigator Captain Joshua Slocum, in his Sailing Alone around the World: Sargasso, scattered over the sea in bunches, or trailed curiously along down the wind in narrow lanes, now gathered together in great fields, strange sea animals, little and big, swimming in and out, the most curious among them being a tiny sea horse which I captured and brought home preserved in a bottle. But marine biologists in general lean toward the opposing view. In their opinion, the area is dead water, deficient in the nutrient salts which encourage plankton, and therefore incapable of sustaining a flourishing chain of life.My own experience, which is all but worthless, would tend to bear out the negative point of view. It even supplies some fresh contradictions of its own. The extremities of the Horse Latitudes navigated by my ship, far from threatening to becalm us, were rudely tossed by stiff westerly winds and cresting seas. Furthermore, while sargassum weed was everywhere, it was scarcely more plentiful than in the Gulf Stream, and at no time did I spy a patch more imposing than a good-sized blanket. In a long day spent on deck I saw no animals, big or small, except the ubiquitous flying fish and a single tiny Velella, or by-the-wind sailor, a species of sea-going jellyfish which, like its relative Physalia, the Portuguese man-of-war, wanders the surface of the ocean by means of an elevated float, a kind of dorsal sail. The sea birds in evidence farther north had disappeared, and as for horses, I saw none.My vantage point at the rail of a rolling freighter is scarcely an auspicious one, however, and the only scientific observation I feel qualified to confirm is that the Sargasso Sea is indeed deep blue; it is a vibrant, intense blue, depthless as polished stone (a fact which would seem to indicate a relative paucity of plankton communities, in case any reasonable doubt remains in this regard). And if these seas are barren, it is nevertheless true that one of the most unusual of natural histories has its start here. Far below this ship, all breeding adults of the common fresh-water eel of North America, North Africa, and Europe, arriving at unknown rates, by unknown routes, are now convening: by spring, myriad blade-shaped larvae will have hatched from eggs suspended in the murk one hundred fathoms down, and a year later (three years, in the case of the smaller European form) will enter the river mouths, ascend the streams, in the shape of elvers. There they will remain and grow, in the yellow, sluggish phase familiar to Izaak Walton, who was unable to locate their eggs or very young and who, in The Compleat Angler, reported doubtfully the opinion that they bred out of the putrefaction of the earth, and divers other ways, or of a particular dew, falling in the months of May or June on the banks of some particular ponds or rivers . . . which in a few days are, by the suns heat, turned into eels. After a period of five to twenty years these yellowish eels will change one autumn to a clean marine silver and, reversing the life process of the salmon, make their way back to the sea, to that vast backwater thousands of submarine miles away upon which now, by the hand of a mustachioed Brazilian seaman,

we splash a great pail of nutrient garbage and pass on.November 26. Bahamas Approaches.The first fine day, blue and bright, and calm, gleaming seas. At daybreak a few whitecaps still, but these have since disappeared. The Brazilian sailors are putting up sun canvas on the frames of the afterdeck and on the bridge. These men vary in color, but most are intermediates, called morenos, and all brandish gigolos mustaches. They wear G.I. clothes and Levis as a rule, and one man has the traditional floppy peasant sombrero made of sisal. His companion, however, is rigged out for the tropics in a pair of skiers goggles, worn jauntily on a checked loggers cap, complete with ear flaps.A Norwegian freighter, the Margaret Onstad, comes up on our starboard quarter and crosses close across our bowsoutward bound, to judge from her present course, from Jacksonville or Fernandina to South Africa. We are presently several hundred miles due east of northern Florida.November 27. The Caicos and Inaguas.The Antilles Current and the Caicos Passage at first light, and a far Caribbean day expanding on the sky, the blue water sharpened by the northeast trades. Way off to the eastward, perhaps twenty miles, the Caicos Islands of the outer Bahamas, vaporish and small, rise on a silver horizon. The Caicos Islandshow many have ever seen them, for they are far off the trade and tourist routes? I savor a faint feeling of discovery.In the next hour the islands drift forward, ever nearer the bright wake of the sun. First one, then two, as the ships position changes, and finally three or morebut this is an illusion, the curious mirage effect one often sees at sea. There is only one island visible, Providenciales, with considerable elevation for the Bahamas. The mass floats off mysteriously, semi-transparent in the early light like a puff of wool, and finally, directly beneath the climbing sun, goes up in fire.No islands visible to the westward, only a huge freighter northward bound, so heavily cargoed that from this distance she appears to ride dangerously down by the head. Our own ship rolls gracefully along in the light swell; at times no other verb describes this motion.An hour later West Caicos appears off to the eastward, and there is a dark, solitary sail. I can imagine it as if it were nearby, a heavy Bahamian fishing smack built originally, perhaps, at Man-o-War Key in the Abacos. These ragged craft, trading, transporting, fishing for crawfish and conchs, wander everywhere in the treacherous, windy waters of the Antilles, with neither compass nor a sense of passing time.To starboard rises the low, barren mass of Little Inagua, and about noon we come riding down upon Great Inagua, that large island north and east of Cuba. Clouds are flying across the sun, and the sea beneath is a dramatic blue-black, the color of a swordfish.And still no birds.* * *In the late afternoon, approaching the Windward Passage (a name as beautiful as Tierra del Fuego), a pomarine jaeger, dark and swift, prowled our wake for nearly an hour. During this time two large porpoises of a strange caf-au-lait color breached off the port quarter; they were so light that, hundreds of yards away, they were visible even under water. The splash they made was taut in the bright bluesudden, magnificent, exciting, as if the whole silent sea had come to life. Behind the southern clouds at twilight, Haiti is looming, high and mountainous.November 28.At daybreak we arrived off Port-au-Prince. Mountains rose on both sides of the bay, the ridges to the eastward fired by the sun, and a soft mist shrouded the harbor and the town, which lay still in semi-darkness. Against the mist the lateen silhouettes of native sloops wavered and spun, sharp black as Japanese prints in this odd light.A small launch rushed up out of the mist and honked officiously at the ship. The legend Capitaine du Port had been unsteadily inscribed upon its transom, and it fairly swarmed with Haitians, over half of them resplendent in varieties of official dress. A number of these dignitaries came aboard, and after a short exchange of civilities and protocol with Mr. Groen, our dignified chief stewardhe may have been taken for the captaindeparted once again on their tiny craft, leaving only the port pilot. The pilot conducted us back up the bay, to the float at the end of the long loading chute of the Caribbean Meal Company. Here we are scheduled to take on some four hundred and fifty tons of grain meal, for shipment to Barbados.With my fellow passengers, an hour later, I was driven in the shipping agents car along the coast road to Port-au-Prince. On our left rose scrubby foothills, and to our right lay canefields and small marshes, fringed by the mangrove border of the bay. Starved, scattered cattle, like survivors of some calamity, wandered aimlessly in the brake, accompanied by the cattle egret, an Old World species which, some thirty years ago, confounded ornithologists by spreading in a few swift decades from its normal haunts in Europe and North Africa to the Americas and even Australia. It has become well established in several of our Southern states, and a few have turned up in Canada and Bermuda.In the countryside a few species of birds were relatively plentiful, including several varieties of egrets and herons, yellowlegs, kestrels, and a flock of groove-billed anis. All of these but the ani are common birds of the United States, and even the latter may be found in southern Florida. But in the outskirts of the town is a rich tropic vegetation of palms, coffee trees, hibiscus, poinsettia, flamboyant, and many others, and the only birds seen in an entire day oftourisme were a group strung from the barrel of an ancient small-caliber rifle on the ragged shoulder of a native boy, including such morsels as woodpeckers and hawks. The poverty of Port-au-Prince is awe-inspiring and may well account for the scarcity of visible life so striking here.* * *Port-au-Prince has a certain charm, the sort of charm which is generally described as indefinable, since there doesnt seem much to recommend it. It is a great catch-all of hovels and un-assimilated modern architecture, but there is nevertheless a cheerful, rakish air about it, with its pervasive pastels bright against a background of dark volcanic mountain.November 29. To the Windward Passage.This morning I got up at six to watch the completion of the loading. This grain meal, or pollards, is supposed to provide animal feed in Barbados, but I wonder if it isnt really for the natives. . . . Disheartened by this thought, I retired after a while to the afterdeck, where I passed more than an hour observing the tropical fish around the pilingssmall delicate blue tangs, yellow-tailed, swaying with the current, the

swift blue knife-finned reef fishes, and squadrons of black and yellow striped sergeant majors. Farther out, where garbage from the ship has drifted, a great brown grouper, twenty pounds or more, was feeding hoggishly, like a carp, swirling clumsily on the stagnant surface, and everywhere slid needlefish, blue-tailed, and beaked like ancient marine reptiles; one of these was almost three feet long.Leaving the pier an hour later, the Venimos retraced her inbound course, heading north-northwest up Gonaves Gulf toward the Windward Passage. Gonave Island like a dead whale to port, and on the starboard side the dark mountainous coasts, crests shrouded in dense cumulus, loomed in oppressive contrast to a soft, slimy sea. Fish were everywhere, their movements chafing the still surface, but birds were all but absent, only an occasional royal tern; and in the distance was another pair of large brown porpoises.The coast grows wilder as the day moves on, with sharp cliffs and buttes, and forlorn, empty bights and bays. Here and there a sagging sail, and, toward the cape, a rubble of thatch huts set back on small thin mud-gray beaches.At the cape itself, entering the Passage and turning east again, the wind freshens with startling rapidity, and whitecaps leap up everywhere. A small sloop appears out of the north, making for land and tilting wildly in the unruly gusts. On the bow, where I spent the afternoon, it was difficult to tell the winds directions: a string held by the fingers flew toward the stern, obeying the ships passage, but, held below the level of the gunwale, it blew forward, though there seemed to be no following wind.The north cape of Haiti, at the Windward Passage, must surely be one of the loneliest places in the world, its steep windswept slopes plunging into a deep, dark sea; one jagged rock scar, where the boulder had apparently torn away all the thin cover on its downward rush, is visible miles away.We pass beneath the cape at sundown. It is nearly dark now, but in the west the clouds are still touched with violet over Cubas Sierra Maestra. To the northeast lies the faint silhouette of the old pirate island of Tortuga.November 30December 2. Hispaniola, Mona Passage, and the Caribbean.Another beautiful hot smooth day. We are four or five miles off the Dominican Republic, and Hispaniola here is still extremely mountainous, with one very high peak due southeast at eight a.m. Perfect conditions for sighting whales, porpoises, sea turtles, sharks, and billfish, but there is nothing all day, not even a solitary bird.During the night the ship entered the Mona Passage between Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, and at daylight the former has already vanished, with Puerto Rico rising off to the north. Now we are actually in the Caribbean, and there are birds this morning, all red-footed boobies so far, but at least a dozen of these, pounding along on deep-crooked wings. A white adult dives on flying fish off to the south, quite like our northern gannetand of course these birds are tropical members of the gannet family.During the day the boobies are replaced by a pair of frigate birds, the so-called man-of-war birds, a red-throated male and a white-headed immature. These slide almost disdainfully across the ship, their wings, seven feet in spread, like thin bent blades, and their long tails deeply forked. In their easy, ominous flight they are among the most aerial of birds. They are replaced in their turn by jaegers, six or more, one of them in a very black phase which I have never seen before.The stars are luminous tonightgreat sprawling Orion, and red Betelgeuse, Sirius flashing like an oncoming comet, and above them, nearly overhead, Taurus, Auriga, and the lovely Pleiades.The second of December, and the weather continues fair. No land in sight today. A few jaegers, and a distant booby. In the afternoon a whale was sighted from the bridge, but I wasnt told of it in time to see it.December 3. The Windward Islands.Dominica is the northernmost of the Windward Islands, which also include Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent, and Grenada: the French islands of Guadaloupe and Martinique, which geographically are members of this group, are not considered Windward Islands by the British. Nevertheless, a French heritage is evident here, not only in the pronunciation of the namethe island is called Do-mi-ni-cabut in the prevailing patois of the natives, most of whom speak a shy English also.The Windward Islands were populated originally by peaceful Arawak Indians, but invasions of warlike Caribs from the region of the apparently dispossessed these people: the Caribs killed off the Arawak males and incorporated the females into their own culture. They were finally displaced in their turn by Spanish, French, and English, though not without a struggle. Dominica, in fact, was so difficult to subdue that it was left virtually alone for nearly two centuries after its discovery by Columbus in 1498. A Carib reservation still exists here, and a few Indians are scattered out among the other islands, but long ago the Caribs mixed freely with the Negro slaves, and the race has all but passed out of existence.The capital of Dominica is Roseau, a small red-roofed town on the leeward shore, and it is visited infrequently by tourists for these reasons: as in Haiti, there is no decent beach any closer than the far side of the mountains, which are of considerable size (the largest, Mount Diablotin, is named for the nearly extinct black-capped petrel, which is thought to have nested there in the past); modern hotels and facilities are limited-to-totally-wantingeven that humble staple of the tourist, the common postcard, is hard to come by in Roseauand finally, the tourist willing to accept these drawbacks is rewarded with exorbitant prices. He is expected to pay, it seems, for the thousands of others who have failed to put in an appearance.All of this is too bad, for Roseau, bright and steepled against a background of deep green valleys and verdant cragsand I use the word verdant because it suits the mood of these broken volcanic summits, which a Poussin or a Watteau would quite appreciateis a striking place. There are said to be 365 small rivers on the island, and, following one of these inland, one finds oneself in a rich tropic valley where lime, coconut, grapefruit, and banana trees are farmed commercially, and at the head of which, where the black, cloud-shadowed peaks converge, are two high, lovely waterfalls. The vegetation includes a variety of palms, flamboyant, coffee, breadfruit, mango, eucalyptus, banyan, and poincianasthe latter the most magnificent I have ever seen. The islands northern coast is said to be considerably more beautiful, and if this is so, then it is very beautiful indeed.

Unfortunately, though the Venimos called at all the Windward Islands, one had to be satisfied with brief impressions; among the latter, for what they are worth, is that all four are quite similar geographically, but that Dominica is the most unspoiled (despite this same claim by Saint Vincent on its own behalf) and the most striking. Saint Vincent can claim the first breadfruit tree in the islands, imported from the Pacific by the Bountys Captain Bligh, as well as what must be the most striking view in the Windwards, obtainable from Fort Charlotte, high above the capital of Kingstown. From this fort, one of many such relics of the faraway European wars, one can see the long line of Grenadine Islands, stretching away southward toward Grenada. And it was the Grenadines, still virtually untouched, which, passing close by one lovely afternoon, most excited my curiosity. Perhaps because we did not stop therethey are largely uninhabitedI felt quite strongly that one day I would go back.I have warm impressions of the other islands too, of the pretty little ports at Castries (Saint Lucia) and Saint Georges (Grenada), of wonderful swimming on long tropic beaches at both these places, of a school of small whalespilot whales, or blackfishbeneath a swirl of terns and boobies, the latter sparkling white against the mountains of Saint Vincent, and of a sail in a small dinghy off Saint Lucia with my friends the radio officer, the chief engineer, and the third mate.That these men invited me to go along is a sign of the new atmosphere of relaxation which has prevailed aboard ship since we reached the Caribbean; it may be a symptom of that wild unbuttoning process described by Cline as a phenomenon induced by tropic suns. The officers are outfitted in white regulation shorts, not always shipshape, and a good deal of informal rum-drinking takes place in one cabin or another of an afternoon in port.December 57. Barbados.The island of Barbados, where the ship called for three days after our departure from Saint Lucia and before proceeding to Saint Vincent, lies one hundred miles or so out to the eastward of the Windward Islands. Like Bermudaand unlike the Windwards, which are peaks of a submerged mountain rangeit is a true oceanic island, surrounded by a fringing reef of coral, and more or less unrelated, geologically, to the mainland. Its countryside, patched by canefields, is low and rolling for the most part, with small spare farm communities and pretty churches and roadside trees bent permanently by the trades. When the sea drops out of sight, the landscape brings to mind certain areas in our Plains States, the sugarcane mills standing up out of dry distances like grain elevators in North Dakota, say, on a long, blue afternoon of summer.December 10. Trinidad.Arrived in Port-of-Spain last night, coming south from Grenada through the cut between Trinidad and the Paria Peninsula of Venezuela, known as the Dragons Mouth. A gray day, the first in a long time, and rather welcome. The anchorage is wide, with boats in black silhouette littered out across the dull sheen of it as far as the eye can see. This is not very far today. Laughing gulls, winging up and down.Its name, Port-of-Spain, is the prettiest aspect of this great dirty town which, according to the port pilot, sees more shipping tonnage come and go than Liverpool. It has a kind of tarnished modernity about it, a fly-by-night air, like an abandoned fair invaded by a pack of gypsies, and it has that terrible sweet smell common to all towns in these latitudes, one which Ive found impossible to track down. The smell has now invaded the ship itself, like some sort of pervasive melancholia; it loiters in the vicinity of the galley. Im told that the island of Trinidad is beautiful and am quite ready to believe it, but I have a very poor impression of its capital. It seems appropriate that, throughout this long listless day, a squadron of vultures swept up and down on the citys damp, stagnant airs.The name of the place, as I recall from the days when I collected stamps, is actually Trinidad-and-Tobago. The latter is a much smaller island off to the northeast, and, having rounded the cape to the north again, we left it astern at eight a.m. the following morning, headed southeast for Georgetown, British Guiana. We are off the many mouths of the Orinoco, and the water is discolored. A frigate bird, a distant booby, and two black-backed, white-bellied shearwaters, unidentifiableconceivably the lost diablotin, but in all probability Audubons shearwater.December 12. British Guiana.We are now in green coastal waters, silky and turgid, but the low land is invisible. In midday the screws of theVenimos churn up great gouts of brown sand as we ease over a bar, for here the continental shelf, built up by the numerous rivers, is very broad and shallow.One-thirty p.m., and South America now in sight, a low black line in the sunny mist. Royal terns and laughing gulls, both familiar birds at home, are the first signs of its wildlife. An hour later we enter the Demerara River, with Georgetown to port, its long quays banked with freighters. There is the Kronos, a hard-looking rusty craft, black and copper-orange, out of Monrovia, and the green Ankaka out of Liverpool, its taffrail crowded with grimy seamen. One old big-backed tub of guts lets fly his spit in our direction; he owns, on closer inspection, the meanest face I have seen in many months, and he has with him the usual thin acolyte, smirking and agitating. Long black skiffs careen up and down the rivers muddy chop, powered by outboards, tall raucous Negroes upright in their sterns.On the warehouse roof perches a bird, bright-yellow-bellied. This is the bienteveo tyrant, a large flycatchermy first wild creature indigenous to South America.2. AMAZONASSURINAM, PARAMARIBO, SINNAMARIE, CAYENNE: small mountains rise behind the flat mud coasts of the Guianas, and small islands fleck a horizon of humid clouds. One of these is the infamous Devils Island, now a beacon. Off Cayenne, at the edge of Brazilian waters, out of sight of land, a strange lugger drops its sail in signal, and the ship veers sluggishly to investigate. But as we draw near the craft makes off erraticallyshe has signaled us by mistake. A smuggler, apparently, one of a fleet of midnight traders which serve Brazils huge appetite for contraband.Our ship is British, and austerely we pass on. The Venimos is nearly a month out, and her cargo is reduced to a small tractor for Belm, oil machinery for Manaus, and shotguns, rifles, and storage batteries for the terminal port of Iquitos in Peruthese in addition to her regular consignment of general goods and foodstuffs, most of which (including a shipment of

Christmas trees for the Windward Islands) has now been left behind. She is all but hollow, and she rides high on the olive waters of this forlorn coast, beating southeast against the North Equatorial Current. To the west, just over a dull skyline, lies the wild region of the Araguar River.December 18.The equator is crossed during the night, and at dawn, off the village of Salinas, the pilot comes aboard. Now we are bearing west again, the rising sun directly astern, and ahead a morass of shifting currents, tidesmud, green, gray, and silverat odds beneath the broken clouds like unmixed paints. The , and a strange species of tropic tern, strikingly marked across the mantle. Far off, on both sides, small porpoises ease lazily along. A few fishing sloops break the expanse, lateen-rigged, rakish hulls blue beneath rare-colored sails of pink, copper, aquamarine. The jungle, dark, indecipherable patches on the horizon, is too distant to feel as yet, though Maraj Island is rising on the starboard bow, and the river is thickening with sediment. This is the Par Estuary, the southernmost of the mouths, on which lies the rivers important city, A Cidade de Nossa Senhora do Belm do Gro Parthe Par of former days, now called Belm, which, in Portuguese, is Bethlehem.As the morning changes the clouds swell, and a horizon of countless islands and inlets, though still far away, moves forward slowly to surround us. Small settlements rise and sink again into the jungle, and shortly after noon Belm itself appears, gleaming heavily in the hot mist. Ancient river boats and other craft litter its outskirts which, half overgrown, creep out along the river bank, and here the ship anchors for customs inspection, east of the main town.Customs at Belm is a famous joke, for the town depends on contraband for its economy, and the customs officials themselves expect neither more nor less than their fair share. Agreeable fellows, well turned out, they swarm aboard in numbers and a little while later go away again with the booty of cigarettes, whisky, and others items which have been set aside for them. They move on, gay as birds, to the next ship into port, a freighter which has gained on our slow wake all morning. Customs takes place out in the anchorage. When the ship ties up at last along the quay the officials happen to be elsewhere, and the crewmen and most of the officers move their wares ashore. One simple mariner has brought from New York four new transistor phonographs; the profit he will make on these will more than match his salary for the voyage.In this town, an inhabitant told me later, everything is against the law and everything is permitted. If a policeman asks you for a license or a paper, ask him for his authority to ask. He hasnt any. We were sitting in a street caf, and while this man spoke I absorbed the effect of the cobbled streets and quasi-modern buildings, less like Lisbon than like downtown Madrid. Belm is clean and cheerful, though its waterfront has the seaport complement of paupers and prodigious rats, and everywhere the gray-headed urubu, or black vulture, hunching and hopping through the litter on its pale legs, or picking silently at the refuse on the tideline. Across the Par stand the jungle islands, and one has a deep sense of the smallness of Belm, of the hugeness which lies all around it and beyond.While in port I paid a visit to the Belm zoo and botanical gardens, a joint establishment which has had the excellent idea of confining itself to the flora and fauna of the , rather than presenting the usual small-zoo grab-bag of rhesus monkeys, over-age circus animals, and exiled pets. The visit afforded some sort of protection against that flood of misinformation in regard to the and its wildlife which somehow befits the regions titanic aspects.as, as the whole basin is sometimes called, includes large areas of four countries, though the great part of it is in Brazil; in the extent of its unknowns it might be compared to western North America of the early nineteenth century. In places the land behind the river banks is unexplored, and lost cities, lost tribes, and strange animals may still be discovered. This much is true, and exciting enough too, but even so, an immense store of legends has been propagated throughout the centuries, ever since Francisco de Orellana, in 1541, first reported the existence of fierce female warriors in the region of bidos. The legends are augmented at every opportunity, not only by the Indians and settlers, but by the adventurers of all nations who drift in and out of the towns on this huge frontier, and by incautious writers like myself who venture within hearing distance.In four hundred years the river has changed little; its violent wilderness and the potentially lethal elements in its fauna have remained largely intact. The waters of as harbor large crocodilians of the group known as caimans, the mighty river boa or anaconda, two species of puraque or electric eel, sting rays, the notorious piranha, and a sliver-like little fish of wretched bent called the candiru, which seeks out even the smallest orifices of the body and lodges itself with its spines; once implanted, it has to be cut out. Land animals include the jaguar and a variety of poisonous snakes, among which the great sucurucu, or bushmaster, and the jararaca, or fer-de-lance, are perhaps best known; there are also tarantulas, scorpions, and a host of stinging ants and other insects. Biting flies, mosquitoes, and hornets are among the aggressive insects of the air, and this element can boast, as well, the common vampire bat.Beriberi, malaria, leprosy, and blackwater fever are among the many diseases which do well here, and there are still hostile Indians; to read or listen to most accounts of as is to conclude that only a maniac would ever set foot out of doors. The truth, which is something else again, is obscured by the fact that, in this country of unknowns, the legends are not only not readily disproved but are even occasionally confirmed. Finally, it is very difficult not to defer to an apparently honest man who has been in the wilderness, when you and your whole gang of pale authorities have not.In Belm, for example, I fell in with a French Canadian who may as well be called Picquet. He is a lean, neat man, an ex-house-painter and merchant seaman, semi-educated, who carries with him everything he ownsthe clothes on his back, a jackknife, a safety razor with a sawed-off handle which fits into a small wood matchbox, and a waterproof packet containing his passport, billfold, and set of worn maps on which he has traced his journeys through South America. When I met him he was weak with recurrent malaria, and broke, but had arranged with one of the contraband boats to take him as far as

Paramaribo, in Surinam, where he hoped to find work on a freighter bound for Europe.Picquet arrived on this continent three years ago, traveling alone and on foot, with a shotgun and two compasses, down through the trackless jungles between the Canal Zone and central Colombia (this is the wild area where a long gap still exists in the Pan-American Highway); since then he has walked, worked, and hitchhiked his way through every country but Paraguay. I could find no flaw in his accounts, nor any real reason to doubt him. (I dont have to make up stories, he remarked at one point, because nobody would believe what I actually have seen, anyway; Ive seen too much. He said this with polite indifference to my opinion, and perhaps that is the charm of the worlds Picquetsthat catlike and quiet indifference, even to those who, as in my case, were paying for his beer. This trait is a peculiarity of wanderers, so familiar that I felt I must have crossed paths with Picquet before, in the deserts of the West, perhaps, or in Alaska. Its a disturbing quality, and one that induces a certain self-consciousness about ones glasses, say, or the gleam of ones new khaki pants.) For most of what he recounted, consciously or otherwise, he supplied a ready means of checking up on his story and, with a restraint rare in these parts, he actually belittled the dangerous nature of jungle creatures; he admitted that poisonous snakes and other animals were a menace under special circumstances, but, in his opinion, the only one which, unprovoked, might attack and kill a man was the anaconda. I had mixed feelings when he succumbed at last and described a rare striped cat not quite so large as a jaguar and very timid, which is possessed of two very large protruding teeth: this animal, he said, occurs in the mountain jungles of Colombia and Ecuador, and he has glimpsed it once himself. (No such cat is known, of course, but one great asset such stories bear with them is the pathetic eagerness of listeners like myself to rationalize them. Lets suppose, I exulted, that the saber-toothed tiger, like the cougar, had long ago established itself here in a smaller subspecies and had thus survived the Ice Age extinction of its North American ancestor; what are the llama, vicua, and guanaco, after all, but living descendants of cameloid animals which became extinct on the northern continent? For one wild moment, propped up by my own zoological jargon, I teetered on the brink of great discovery.) I believe Picquet was sincere in his account, however mistaken, though the matter did not seem to concern him much one way or the other. He went on to describe how he and another seaman had fallen overboard from their freighter during World War II, when a deck cargo of lumber shifted in heavy seas off Trinidadand here again, curiously, he happened to mention the name of the American destroyer which retrieved him eight hours later, so that this story, like most of the rest, could readily be traced. He believes he has a charmed life, and has since put it to the test all across the world. I cant sit still, he said, and this was quite literally true; his sad eyes were never really with me, even when he was talking with animation. I figure I have thirteen liveshe did not bother to explain thisand have used up about seven. That leaves me six to go. I nodded, expecting him to say that when he reached number twelve he would stop wandering and go home. He didnt, though. When I get to number thirteen, he said, Ill die.* * *The ship sailed at two in the morning, to take advantage of the tides, and at daybreak we were well beyond the mouth of the Tocantins River. To the north rose Maraj Island, which sits in the mouth of the like a huge cork. Though the Par is wide here, the channels are treacherous and narrow; on Mandihoy Bank, which boasts the sole navigation light in all the thousands of miles of river, the hulks of two sunken vessels protrude like black and rotten stumps.The jungle is remote, rather ominous, on every side. An occasional white egret, like a speck caught on the distant walls of green, the yellow-billed river terns coursing the brown wake for tumbled minnows, and far, floating urubusthese are the only life.