



The English Governess at the Siamese Court, Being Recollections of Six Years in the Royal Palace at Bangkok

Anna Leonowens

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Anna Leonowens is a controversial figure even now. Her name may not even have really been Leonowen (but the more common Welsh Owens), her husband not dead from heatstroke in a tiger hunt, but from drink, and not a British army officer at all. Nevertheless, her account of her time in Siam as the royal governess is ever popular and fascinating reading. In addition to "The English Governess at the Siamese Court," Anna wrote several books (e.g. "The Romance of the Harem" is one of them). Both "The English Governess at the Siamese Court" and "The Romance of the Harem" were novelized by Margaret Landon into the more familiar "Anna and the King of Siam." Part of the controversy over Anna Leonowens stems from the fact that any criticism of Thai royalty is not tolerated in Thailand. The king is held in a religious esteem and is the heart and soul of the country. As a result, Anna Leonowen's casual remarks on the king's temper and habits are practically heresy to the Thai, thus, she and her writing are targets for criticism. And what's worse, her pupil Chulalongkorn or Rama V, is Thailand's MOST revered king--kind of a Thai saint. His portrait is found in nearly all Thai homes and businesses. Having that as a background, it's still fun to read Anna's account of her time in Thailand. Though many people feel that Anna distorted or hid the truth about herself in many ways, the book gives a fascinating look into a magical land. Anna's writing is typically Victorian; the prose is a bit ornate and not as direct as the writing of Landon.

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