



The English Governess at the Siamese Court: Being Recollections of Six Years in the Royal Palace at Bangkok (Oxford in Asia Paperbacks)

Anna Harriette Leonowens

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The English Governess at the Siamese Court: Being Recollections of Six Years in the Royal Palace at Bangkok (1870) vividly recounts the experiences of one Anna Harriette Leonowens as governess for the sixty-plus children of King Mongkut of Siam, English teacher for his entire royal family, and translator and scribe for the King himself. Bright, young, and energetic, Leonowens was well-suited to these roles, and her writings convey a heartfelt interest in the lives, legends, and languages of Siam's rich and poor. She also tells of how she and the King often disagreed on matters domestic. After all, this was the first time King Mongkut had met a woman who dared to contradict him, and the governess found the very idea of male domination intolerable. Overworked and underpaid, Leonowens would eventually resign, but her exchanges with His Majesty--heated and otherwise--on topics like grammar, charity, slavery, politics, and religion add much to her diary's rich, cross-cultural spirit, its East-meets-West appeal.

Over the years, that appeal has only increased. Eighty years after it first appeared, this memoir inspired the popular book and film, *Anna and the King of Siam*, and a few years later the hit musical, *The King and I*. Now comes yet another version, *Anna and the King*, the new film starring Jodie Foster and Chow Yun Fat. Here, then, is the original tale, presented with many reproductions of the fine drawings that the King had offered as gifts to Leonowens. *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* remains engaging as a story of adventure, fascinating as a picture of nineteenth-century Bangkok, and intriguing as an account of life inside King Mongkut's palace.

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