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Susan Morgan, *Bombay Anna: The Real Story and Remarkable Adventures of the King and I Governess*

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Reviewed by Susan F. Kepner.

Anna Harriett Emma Edwards Owens, who was born in Bombay in 1831 of racially mixed parentage, is much better known as her self-created avatar: an English lady named Anna Leonowens who was born in Wales, went to Siam as a widow, became Governess to the Royal Children of the Siamese Court, and then wrote books about her experiences. Some elements of this description were completely true, some were complete fabrications, and many were a bit of both.

Susan Morgan's biography is a valuable study of Leonowens's actual origins, her life in the context of those origins, and the surprisingly long and successful career that she enjoyed after her years in Siam, as an author, lecturer, and social activist in North America. In addition, the book informatively explores Leonowens's era (b. 1831, d. 1914), including the lives of European, Indian, and Siamese people in South and Southeast Asia during the colonial era; the nature and achievements of the Protestant missionary effort in Siam during the reign of King Mongkut; and the liberal literary elite community in North America at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Morgan begins by tracing the career of Anna's grandfather, William "Billy" Vawdrey Glascott, who travelled from England to Bombay to join the Indian Army in 1810. The gulf between the prestigious British Army proper and the East India Company's lowly Indian Army, whose recruits were of English, Irish, and Indian descent, was vast. The Glascott men were not lacking in intelligence, education, or accomplishment. Most of them were clergymen, including Billy's father, the well-known Reverend Cradock

Glascott, who represented a dissident, reformist group within the Church of England. Cradock Glascott's "radical Methodist position had put him and his children outside the sphere of social influence and mentoring" (p. 17), and his son Billy Glascott, neither destined for the ministry, radical or otherwise, nor heir to a great or even middling fortune, had few career choices in Victorian England.

Two major themes of this biography are opportunity and opportunism. Opportunities to better oneself, in Victorian England and the colonies, were limited to people who were born into or on the fringes of the aristocracy and to a few people who were, if not so well born, intelligent, ambitious, and willing enough to please their betters enough to begin an arduous climb up the social ladder. Such opportunities were almost nonexistent for unmarried women, and they were entirely nonexistent for men or women who were known to be less than entirely white. Anna Leonowens, who was not an aristocrat, not willing to please her betters unless she agreed with them, and less than entirely white, had very few opportunities for advancement available to her. When opportunities appeared, however, her natural ability, combined with an impressive streak of opportunism, would literally save her life, and the lives of her children, and propel her into fame, social acceptance, and economic security.

The lives of both Billy Glascott and his granddaughter Anna did reflect one legacy of the Glascott family's reformist tendencies. Morgan relates that in India, Billy was known for a curious degree of sympathy and tolerance that extended even to Indians. As for Anna, her own life-long concern with civil rights, education, and social rescue programs, from India to Siam to North America, would uncannily mirror the views and values of the great-grandfather she never knew.

Once established in India, Billy Glascott married a woman who was either fully Indian, or the child of an Indian mother. Morgan writes, "The one certain fact about Anna's grandmother is that she could not have been European" (p. 23). How can she be so certain? Billy Glascott was a lieutenant in the Indian Army, and, for financial reasons alone, "No lieutenant had a prayer of marrying an English girl" (p. 23). The pool of

available young women of mixed race was substantial, however, and a large Anglo-Indian population proceeded from these unofficial but socially recognized marriages.

Morgan provides a memorable depiction of the drunkenness and squalor that characterized life for many Indian Army men and their families. Here, however, there is a problem. Morgan admits that in spite of the dreadful conditions she describes, Anna's childhood does not appear to have been so very dreadful. It is unclear how much the worst of conditions affecting "Fort children" actually affected Anna. What is certain is that Anna emerged from her childhood with a very good education, speaking at least three languages (including Hindi), and with an understanding of many Asian peoples and their religions. Morgan writes,

Among the lower social levels of the people connected to the Company in British India, there was little sense of a nuclear family as we understand it today . . . One spouse or another died all the time and the remaining spouse usually remarried . . . Fort children ran around in packs . . . When it was time to sleep, they often lay down in piles like puppies . . . The privacy we strive for so relentlessly . . . would have been considered a sign of dementia . . . (p. 43).

This information is interesting, and no doubt it describes the childhoods of many Fort children of the time. But Morgan presents no clear evidence that Anna, her siblings, and friends "often lay down in piles like puppies," and so on. If growing up in such a society helps to explain Anna's ability to deny her entire family of birth, when she set about to re-create herself, the fact is that she was completely devoted to her own family, what we would today call her "nuclear family," especially to her daughter Avis and her son-in-law Thomas Fyshe. Indeed, Anna raised Avis's children in Halifax after the latter's tragic early death; she also took care of her son Louis's children for several years in the same city.

Anna's mother, Billy's daughter Mary Ann Glascott, was only thirteen years old when she married Anna's father, Thomas Edwards. Morgan sums up Anna's parents as "not an outwardly impressive couple . . . Yet, the descendants of this couple would make history .

..” (p. 31). Mary Ann and Tom would have two daughters, Anna and her older sister Eliza, who had a daughter also named Eliza, who in turn had nine children. These latter included a son who also lavishly re-invented himself – as the English actor Boris Karloff!

At the age of 19, Mary Ann was widowed and almost immediately remarried; at that time, Anna was only six weeks old. Patrick Donahue, the stepfather who raised her, was a hard-working and decent man, and gradually the family’s fortunes increased. When Donahue died, in his fifties, he left some property, and the family was far better off than many in British India. Unfortunately, he would not fare well in Anna’s invented past. At one point, she would deflect curiosity about her seeming lack of family by claiming that her stepfather had been so opposed to her marriage (to the fictitious “Major Leonowens”) that it had caused a permanent rift between herself and all of her relatives, a rift that could never be mended. Surviving correspondence in which Patrick Donahue appears as a caring, broad-minded man disproves this “rift.” In the years before the final break with her past, before she departed Singapore in 1862 as Anna Leonowens, a British lady bound for the Court of Siam, she had depended upon both her mother and stepfather in many ways. They had never turned her away when she needed a place to stay, or help with her children. But, those days were past. After she decided to become a member of the British elite, and certainly a member the Caucasian race, her problematic family had to be “given away”—before they could give her away, either by intention or by accident.

By the time Anna married, at the comparatively late age of 17, she was a well educated, composed, intelligent young woman. She already had considerable experience as a teacher, because the grammar school that she had attended followed the Madras system of education, in which the older children (especially the brightest) taught the younger. Anna’s husband, Thomas Leon Owens, was a well-educated Irish immigrant clerk, and their life, until his tragic and early death, was happy if not prosperous.

Anna was married only once, and Morgan reasonably concludes that he was the love of her life. Thomas Leon Owens is described as coming from “a middle-class Protestant family, literate but not well off” (p. 56), but in his writings, several examples of which

appear in the biography, he appears to be more than just literate. He was highly intelligent and quite a good and affecting writer. “Oh Annie, how much, how fervently, and truly, do I love you, by day you constantly occupy my thoughts and by night I dream of you . . . Do you, Annie, love me, continue to love me as of yore?” (p. 60) There is a fine irony to the lyrics of “Hello, Young Lovers,” written for the Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein musical “The King and I.” For Rodgers and Hammerstein could not know that these charming letters existed. Yet the song begins, “When I think of Tom, I think of a night when the earth smelled of summer and the sky was streaked with white . . .” In the song, of course it is England where the earth smelled of summer and the sky was streaked with white, but Tom’s Annie never set foot in England until years after his death in Penang, and her own rebirth.

Anna and Tom lived for a few years in Australia, described by Morgan as a grueling time, spent in desolate environments. After the bleak years in Australia, Tom found a job in Penang, managing a hotel. There, in 1857 and at the age of 31, Tom died of “apoplexy” (usually, a stroke, or with symptoms resembling a massive stroke). The devastated Anna had two children to support somehow, Avis and Louis, who were then four and two years of age. Typically, the only option for such a woman was re-marriage, as soon as possible. This was the option that her own mother had chosen immediately after Anna’s birth.

Between Tom’s death in 1857, her resettlement in Singapore in 1859, and 1862, when she left Singapore to accept the position of teaching King Mongkut’s children at the Siamese Court, Anna Harriett Edwards Owens became someone else. While she ably tutored the children of Western families in Singapore, she invented and refined her history as Anna Leonowens.

The story she told to sympathetic new friends was rather simple and sad. She had been born in Wales, the daughter of a Captain Crawford who went to India and “died heroically in the Sikh rebellion” (p. 70). Her mother (her imagined British mother, in Wales, that is) had then married the man who later would bitterly oppose (for reasons that

were never quite clear) Anna's marriage to Major Thomas Leonowens. Tragedy would strike again, when Tom died of heat exhaustion following a tiger hunt in Penang—which was partially true, since Anna's husband had died, and he had done so in Penang, where there were indeed both tigers and hunts. These were the main features of her new history, which she would continue to embroider for the rest of her life. The caution with which Anna contrived her story is impressive. Every detail had been thought out, with people and events that would be impossible to find, challenge, or disprove, were anyone to try. A Sikh rebellion, an Indian Mutiny that led to a bank failure that caused her to lose her fortune, her husband's death after the tiger hunt—all so sad, but also very adventurous and quite thrilling. She was a born storyteller.

Morgan describes Anna's careful befriending of Americans in Singapore, people who were unlikely to observe certain details that British people might notice, or even look for. Beginning with those two years in Singapore, Americans would provide Anna Leonowens with friendship, acceptance, connections, and access to social, professional, and financial success for the rest of her life.

Once Anna Leonowens was established at the Siamese Court, where she taught and spent most of her time between 1862 and 1867, she did more than teach English, history, and science to the king's children. Morgan provides evidence that she was trusted by King Mongkut, who valued her insights into British thinking, and the likely reactions of the British to situations involving Siam and its neighbors. The king occasionally asked her to serve as a go-between, carrying both verbal and written messages to various British officials, when he did not want to involve Siamese officials.

The first two books that Anna would write after she left Siam, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (1870) and *The Romance of the Harem* (1872), were amalgamations of fact, memory, gossip, and imagination – and thus quite typical of Victorian travel writing by both men and women. King Mongkut never saw them; he died in 1868, while Anna was on leave from her position and living in New York. She wanted to stay in the United States, and in fact was already at work on *The English Governess*, in a small rented

cottage in the Catskills. But, unable to afford to stay, she resigned herself to returning to Siam to fulfill her contract. And then came the news of King Mongkut's death. Morgan does not address the question of how the king's death prevented Anna from returning to Siam and taking up her job of educating the royal children, a task that might have been even more critical in the early years of the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), when he was still a boy under the authority of a Regent. In any event, the change of regime gave Anna the opportunity to change course, as she was inclined to do anyway, and she never returned to Siam.

James T. Fields, the husband of one the close friends whom Anna made after her arrival in America, was a very important publisher. Indeed, he was the exclusive American publisher of Charles Dickens. He enthusiastically accepted Anna's first manuscript, which he serialized in *The Atlantic Monthly* and then published in book form as *The English Governess* in 1870. It was an immediate success – everywhere except Siam. The Thais understandably reacted with outrage. To begin with, there was and is no Thai tradition of biography that includes information that might be seen as unbecoming to the subject. The whole point of biography was to provide a loving or at least respectful history of an individual's life and contributions. The idea of a royal biography, or anything like it, or even remarks about the character or behavior of a Siamese king included within another book, penned by a commoner – and a foreigner at that – was unthinkable.

Although Anna had presented King Mongkut as a brilliant and capable monarch, a man who adored his children, and was devoted to his family and the kingdom, she also had criticized him. She had written about his temper—well known, but never reported upon. She had also and presented the ladies of the Inner Palace as essentially slaves, lacking any power to make decisions about their own lives. Anna told the world that these women could be imprisoned, flogged, chained, or executed, and that there was nothing anyone could do about it. Nothing but a frank hagiography, and a completely positive view of the Siamese Court, would have been agreeable. But this . . . This was contemptible.

Morgan describes the meeting, in 1897 in London, between Anna and her granddaughter Anna Fyshe and the 46-year-old King Chulalongkorn. According to Anna Fyshe, the king was happy to see his old teacher, but ““expressed great sorrow that she had pictured his father as ‘a wicked old man’ in her books. He said, ‘You made all the world laugh at him, Mem. Why did you do it?’ ‘Because I had to write the truth,’ was the answer” (p. 202).

What truth? One of the important ideas in Morgan’s book—one relating to Anna’s perceptions of her authorial responsibilities, her responsibilities toward the king and Siam, and her notion of “writing the truth”—concerns Nathaniel Hawthorne, whom Anna met in 1872. That was, of course, the year in which *The Romance of the Harem* was published. Hawthorne defined “romance” in very particular terms, declaring that an author ““may present the truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer’s own choosing or creation’...[and this] argument [Morgan explains], one advanced at the time by many other American artists, was that the writer could, and often should, transform the mere facts, should ‘mingle the Marvellous,’ in order to present the truth” (p. 177). Morgan situates Anna among “the traditions of both the ‘romance’ theories of Hawthorne...and the ‘sentimental’ style of Harriet Beecher Stowe” (p. 177), whom Anna also knew, and with whom she formed a lasting friendship.

The Romance of the Harem included many events that were completely false, and of course she knew it. For example, palace ladies of the era might be punished in cruel ways. But burning at the stake, the infamous fate of “Bun,” a palace lady who appears in *The Romance*, was not a Siamese practice, and certainly not a feature of “kot-monthian,” or “palace law.” Anna felt no compunctions about stretching or even abandoning the facts in order to convey what she felt to be greater truths.

Anna Leonowens was obsessed with the lives of the women who lived in the Inner Palace. Although she had a house of her own and friends among the missionary community, and among the British diplomats resident in Bangkok, Morgan believes that

Anna spent most of her time with the palace women and their children, and I agree. It was her job to do so, but she developed close relationships with several of them that went well beyond the terms of her teaching contract. She was closest to the King's head wife, Lady Thiang; to Lady Talap; and especially to Lady Sonklin, an enthusiastic woman who often annoyed the king by her words and actions and was punished with imprisonment for a time after Anna's departure. That last event so enraged Anna that she wrote about it. Anna and Lady Sonklin corresponded with each other for years, Anna's banned book notwithstanding.

The tales of life in the Inner Palace that Anna narrated were combinations of her own observations, stories she had heard from palace ladies, some very well known but mostly apocryphal tales told by Westerners in Bangkok, and completely fictional events that it seemed to her might well have happened. "[Her] fictionalized tales constituted a grand gesture, in which the evils and the heroics were both painted larger than life" (p. 135). Morgan describes the major tales in *The Romance of the Harem* as "preposterous" (p. 135). Summing up, Morgan presents Anna as very knowledgeable about the life of the Inner Palace, but also quite willing to invent terrible incidents, in order to teach her audience of readers that all human beings, women as well as men, deserve to be free, to make their own choices about their lives, and to be treated with both fairness and kindness. Aside from being a gifted storyteller, Anna was always a teacher.

Morgan operates without any Thai language. This constraint notwithstanding, her extended treatment of realities at Mongkut's court and of Anna's attempt to represent those realities in her work comes off rather successfully. Nevertheless, some of her definitions and descriptions of the Inner Palace and of the women who lived there are not correct. For example, she refers to "the women of the Nang Harm" (p. 121). But the term *nang ham* (literally, woman-lady/forbidden) refers to the women, not the institution of the Inner Palace, which was called the *fai nai* (side/within). Besides the *nang ham*, a great many other women resided within the Inner Palace, including a great many *khlon*, royal civil servants whom Anna apparently called "the Amazons" (p. 122). Women had to fill all posts there, many of them doing work that customarily would have been done

by men in the outside world. Because of the great number of children born to Mongkut, and to his father and grandfather as well, another sizeable segment of the Inner Palace population was comprised of the sisters, daughters, cousins, and other female relatives of these kings. Their households were capacious and busy. They required bevy's of servants and attendants, many of whom were slaves.

Morgan writes that “whatever her private opinions of Siamese sexuality may have been . . . [w]hat was wrong . . . from her point of view, was not polygamy per se . . . but that, from the perspective of the women living in [the Inner Palace], their lives and their sexuality were not a matter of their own choice” (pp. 126-27). *Bombay Anna* goes on to examine the relationship between sexual servitude, prostitution, and slavery in Siam.

Morgan also explores Siam's American Protestant missionary community, especially the Presbyterians, who were the most active, well known and influential. Anna knew the famous Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, physician and publisher, quite well. And Mrs. Stephen Mattoon, a prominent missionary wife, became a life-long friend. Clearly, Mrs. Mattoon stood out as Anna's idea of how a missionary ought to live, and behave.

The missionaries in Siam had a very difficult time of it. The majority of Christians in Thailand (then, as now) were members of the Chinese, Vietnamese, or other minority groups. King Mongkut once remarked to his friend Dr. Bradley, “What you teach people to do is admirable, but what you teach them to believe is foolish” (quoted on p. 111). There can be no doubt that the king set the tone for the general Thai attitude toward Christianity. In short, the king made it clear that Thais were to treat the missionaries with respect and gratitude for the educational gifts they were so eager to share. But they were under no obligation to accept their absurd religion, a religion that valued belief in a god over personal responsibility; one need only believe in the Christian god in order to be “saved” from the consequences of one's bad actions. Nothing could have been more deadly to the aims of the missionaries than this scrupulously polite contempt on the part of the revered king, who had been a Buddhist scholar-monk for twenty-seven years

before ascending the throne. There was nothing for a Thai to gain—socially, materially, or spiritually—from abandoning Buddhism and embracing Christianity.

Morgan’s conclusion that the hiring of Anna Leonowens turned out to be a fantastic bargain, both for Anna and for the king, ranks as perhaps the most significant contribution of *Bombay Anna*. “Anna’s position as schoolmistress to the royal children and ladies of Siam provided her for the rest of her life with total credibility about her being an English ‘lady.’ It catapulted her into the class she had fraudulently claimed to be in all along” (p. 99).

And what did the king realize from the bargain? He had not been without access to enthusiastic English-speaking tutors for his children, for the wives of the missionaries were ever eager to serve. But he detested their constant proselytizing. They would agree to teach the children the subjects he wanted them to learn but instead teach them Christian hymns and Bible verses. In Anna Leonowens, he found his ideal teacher, “a Western woman [who] came without the usual jingoistic baggage that saw the Siamese as an inferior race, and Buddhism as an inferior religion” (p. 99). Because of the very “fakery” that has so outraged Thais about Anna Leonowens,

the king found [a teacher] who was capable of respecting his Eastern people and religion, who did not see them as savage heathens in need of conversion, and was able to do so precisely because the Westerner was really just another Easterner . . . She had not only been born in the East but spent her childhood among Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus and was well aware that the English Christians, though they had more public power, were not an inherently superior race. Anna was not an English lady. She was a fake. And it was precisely because she was a fake that she could meet her employer’s criteria . . .

(p. 100)

While Anna Leonowens lived in Siam, there were one model of Protestantism and one approach to Protestant missionary work. It was strict, unbending, and contemptuous of Buddhism, frightening people with images of hell and damnation if they refused to

convert. Not only the Thais, but other Westerners backed away from the doctrinaire and judgmental missionaries, who would turn down invitations to the Palace, or to the homes of aristocrats, if the event might include a theatrical performance or dancing.

The entire Western, or *farang* community in mid-nineteenth century Siam was much smaller than one might think; it numbered only twenty or so in 1851, when Mongkut succeeded to the throne, and fewer than a hundred fifty when he died in 1868. It was hardly a homogeneous group, being divided into merchants, temporary visitors (mostly sailors), missionaries (mostly American), and consular people who often were recruited from one of the other groups. Of these four groups, Morgan writes that Anna had most in common with the missionaries, although her writings would reveal that she did not share their world-view. And she certainly did not share their objectives. As I read the section of the *Bombay Anna* treating the missionaries, I was reminded of being shocked by a prominently displayed placard in the waiting room of a Protestant mission hospital in Bangkok sometime during the 1970s: “Never forget that you are in the land of the heathen.” Anna’s missionary acquaintances must have been at least as shocked to read, in *The English Governess*, “There are influences in the religions of the East to render their followers wiser, nobler, purer” (quoted on p. 99). Wiser, nobler, and purer than whom?

Some have suggested that Anna’s positive remarks about Buddhism and Hinduism were largely the product of the friendships she made with liberal minded and agnostic Americans after she left Siam. This seems highly unlikely. Morgan quotes a paper that Anna’s husband Tom gave, when they were living in Australia during the 1850s, at “a kind of early library and discussion center” (p. 77). The topic, at one meeting in 1854, was “the alleged inferiority of the Coloured races” (p. 77). Tom’s paper “stated emphatically that ‘there is no inferiority of intellect in the Coloured races. Solomon, the wisest of all men, was a coloured man—and from the East, and God himself spoke from the East—and all lands shew the superiority of the Coloured races’” (quoted on p. 77). It was Anna, not the fully Irish Tom Owens, whose forebears included “the Coloured races.” Little wonder that Anna would later find herself comfortable among abolitionists,

social liberals, and suffragettes in England and America. She did not need free-thinking New Yorkers to help her formulate her ideas about racial and cultural stereotyping or discrimination. Clearly, these were ideas about which Anna and her husband Tom, barely subsisting on the fringes of empire in the 1850s, shared passionate and hard-earned opinions.

Morgan presents Anna Leonowens's life in the years after she left Siam in 1867, at the age of thirty-seven, as that of a formidable and socially prominent woman who dominated family members but was well loved by them, and who was never without a book or a lecture tour in the works. She lived most of those years in Halifax, Nova Scotia, with her daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren, except for five years when Anna and Avis took the children to Germany. Anna thought that they would there receive a superior education at less cost than they could in North America.

Anna's third book was the amazing *Life and Travel in India: Being Recollections of a Journey before the Days of Railroads* (1884). If the books about Siam and its Court were fanciful, Anna's "recollections" of travel in India as a gently bred, easily shocked young British girl are in a class of their own. What is most interesting, to the reader who can read between the lines, is how fondly and positively she writes about the Indians, their culture and religions. And her attitude toward the British Empire is also very clear. "It was a very solemn affair for the Briton to be in India," she wrote, "luxuriating on her soil and on her spoils" (quoted on p. 194). She was the same old Anna, with her outrage over "the injustices of social, economic and racial categories" (p. 195). Just as she had made it plain, in a more or less polite way, that the Protestant missionaries in Siam were sanctimonious racial bigots, her kind-hearted friend Mrs. Mattoon notwithstanding, in this book she fixed her gaze on British imperialists. There they sat, ranged around the elegant dinner tables of India, no more aware of the servants, those "dark, silent, stationary creatures any more than if they had been hewn out of stone" (quoted on p. 194).

More and more, Anna's writings championed the cause of racial, religious, and economic equity. Her fourth book, *Our Asiatic Cousins* (1889) was not the usual Victorian or Edwardian catalog of exotic lands, strange people, and their curious customs, but a work on the "fundamental relatedness" of "all people" (p. 197), in Morgan's apt words.

Anna remained creative and busy, studying and lecturing and publishing articles on education and social justice, until, at the age of eighty, she suffered a stroke and became blind and bed-ridden. The last three years of her life must have been terrible for a woman so active, and so devoted to reading. She died at the age of eighty-three, in 1914.

In a brief final chapter of *Bombay Anna*, Morgan turns to Kenneth and Margaret Landon, who went to Siam in the 1920s as Presbyterian missionaries. Kenneth would publish very good two books on the country and become a State Department "expert on Thailand" during and after the Second World War. He had considerable influence on U.S. foreign policy, and on the post-war development of Thailand as the "front line of freedom" in Southeast Asia.

Margaret, who had run a Christian school in the southern Thai province of Trang while Kenneth travelled to spread the gospel, had always wanted to be a writer. She had also longed to live in a way that was socially and economically superior to the kind of life that she and Kenneth endured as missionaries. In short, she wanted gracious living, respect, and money. She tried to market her writing several times before she encountered Anna's books in a fellow missionary's library. She would use those books, along with interviews and memoirs of Anna's descendants, to craft *Anna and the King of Siam* (1944), a work quite different from what Anna had written, in a literary style more reminiscent of *Little House on the Prairie* than of a Victorian travel memoir. The book became a best-seller; it gave rise to the "King and I" industry" that continues to this day. Morgan writes that Anna "would have been delighted" (p. 207) with the attention and with the portrayal of herself as an English lady—but not at all delighted with "some of the values Margaret had resurrected" (p. 208).

Whether she would have been delighted with any of what happened can never be known: I suspect that Anna Leonowens would have had interesting thoughts about a missionary wife who used *The English Governess* and *The Romance of the Harem* in the pursuit of her own fame and fortune, all the way to a Hollywood musical that would have stupefied the Bradleys and the Mattoons . . .

Bombay Anna is an ambitious, engaging, informative work of scholarship, one that is hard not to rate a genuine success. I do nonetheless have some relatively minor cavils about Morgan's book. First, it really deserves a far better title (and sub-title). The title led me to postpone my reading of the book for months; it is leaden, and, with its sub-title, seemingly crafted to contain every relevant book-marketing "keyword" imaginable. But it is neither appealing nor successful in giving any idea of the sort of book that this one really is.

The book's Introduction includes a rambling discussion of other people who have successfully led invented lives. Not a bad idea, but Morgan puts Anna in the company of Frances Gumm, Archibald Leach, and Robert Zimmerman—who re-invented themselves as as Judy Garland, Cary Grant, and Bob Dylan. Morgan is the author of *Place Matters: Gendered Geography in Victorian Women's Travel Books about Southeast Asia* (Rutgers University Press, 1997). Surely, she could have made more apt comparisons to Anna Leonowens than Judy Garland. (If she required a movie star, Merle Oberon would have been a much better choice, given her birth in Bombay as Estelle Merle O'Brien Thompson, daughter of an English father and a Sri Lankan mother.)

Morgan barely mentions the subject of Thai attitudes toward Leonowens's work, perhaps because she is only too well aware that Thais who have any opinion on the subject at all remain fixated on Anna as a liar and ingrate. They do not want to hear or read about the desperate circumstances under which she created a new identity, her motivations in writing the books, her life-long friendships with Thai women, or her life after Siam. The fact that she was not "white" is relished, now that the fact is widely known. Curiously, Thais have shown almost no interest in Margaret Landon, although it was her book *Anna*

and the King of Siam, rather than Leonowens's work, that set in motion the endless stream of stage plays, films, cartoons, etc., identified *in toto* as "The King and I" (up to and including in the full title of this book). It was the stage plays and films that produced the images of King Mongkut that Thais find most heinous: the shirtless dancing king appeared, to Thai eyes, as a fool of a character in a calumny of a theatrical production.

Had it not been for Margaret Landon, Leonowens's books would have been long forgotten by everyone except academics studying Siam in the colonial era. I have pointed this out to quite a few Thais, but they are not interested.

Morgan could have also organized *Bombay Anna* better. Its presentation of events is frequently confusing. Tangential information overwhelms some very important events, and the narration slides back and forth in time. The deaths of the two people Anna loved best, her husband Tom and her daughter Avis, are scattered over a number of pages, instead of being placed at the head of a chapter or at least a section, described, and examined as the grievous and life-changing events that they were.

Tom's death in Penang in 1857 appears several pages into a chapter that begins with Anna stepping off a boat in Singapore, in 1859. The information that Avis, after dining with her husband in Toronto, became ill with food poisoning and died soon after, is all but lost in mid-paragraph, wedged in between accounts of other things that happened that year. The year of Avis's death is not given in the index, and finding it in the text (1902, on p. 203) was not easy. "She was my all in all," Anna wrote to a friend, after her beloved daughter's death, "and all the family is left stranded, desolate and broken hearted" (pp. 203-204). This was a calamitous event in Anna Leonowens's life.

Altogether, however, *Bombay Anna* is readable, valuable, and enjoyable. The more we learn about Anna Leonowens from Susan Morgan, the more amazing and interesting she becomes. She was the ultimate survivor, she overcame tremendous odds, and she accomplished great things. The two appendices are good additions: "The Magnificent

Charter: How the British Got to India” and “The Women of British India.” I hope that Susan Morgan will write more about each of these subjects.

Susan F. Kepner taught Thai language and literature at the University of California-Berkeley from 1991 to 2009. During the 1990s, she began research for a book about the lives of Anna Leonowens and Margaret Landon but set the project aside. She is the author of "Anna (and Margaret) and the King of Siam," Crossroads X, 2 (1997). She is also the translator of Botan's widely read novel, Letters from Thailand. Kepner is now completing a biography of Thai educator and author M.L. Bunluea Thepyasuwan and beginning the translation of Uthis Haemamool's 2009 SEA-Write-Award-winning novel, Lap Lae Kaeng Khoi.

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