The King and I Study Guide

The King and I by Rodgers and Hammerstein

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Introduction

In this romantic musical, the boy-meets-girl plot is woven into the historical context of British Imperialism in Asia. Thus it is also the story of a clash between cultures and the dynamics between Great Britain and "oriental" peoples. The King of Siam invites an English governess to come to his country and teach the children of his many wives about the modern world. Yet he himself resists changing his traditional role as benevolent patriarchal dictator until the attractive and bold young governess wins his heart and his respect. It is his son Prince Chulalongkorn who will carry on the King's program of scientific modernization of Siam after the King's death in the final scene. Oscar Hammerstein based the play on a novel by Margaret Landon, *Anna and the King of Siam*. He and composer Richard Rodgers transformed it into one of the most memorable musicals they produced in their long association together, departing from the more typical "musical comedy" with a more senous treatment of their subject. Yul Brynner played the king in the Broadway production and then in the film version with co-star Deborah Kerr, whose singing was dubbed. Over the years Brynner performed the role over 4,000 times. The film was a box-office success and is still considered one of the better musical films of the twentieth century. The play's enduring popularity was verified in 1996, when film star Lou Diamond Phillips assumed the title role for a successful Broadway revival.

Author Biography

While both Rodgers and Hammerstein are credited as the authors of *The King and I*, there was a distinct division of labor in the writing of the play-as there was with all of their collaborations. Technically, Rodgers is the author of the music and Hammerstein the author of the lyrics and book (or story). This section focuses on Hammerslein's background, as he is the author of the material this entry will examine.

Oscar Hammerstein II was born July 12, 1895, in New York City to a family wiih deep roots in the theatre. Although the Hammerstein family myth holds that Oscar was discouraged from going into the theater, he could have heard of little else at family gatherings. His grandfather and namesake Oscar Hammerstein spent the fortune he made on cigar-rolling inventions building new theaters in New York City and investing in the staging of operas. He passed his interest on to his two sons, Willy and Arthur. Oscar IPs father Willy Hammerstein managed a highly successful vaudeville house and his uncle Arthur was the producer who gave Oscar his first theater job assistant stage manager, which he began at the age of twenty-two. Oscar's decision to take the theater job ended his plans to finish law school at Columbia University. Not that his heart was in the law anyway he decided to attend Columbia more for dramatic activities such as its annual varsity show than its law program. Once launched into the world of the theater, he stayed there for the rest of his life.

By the time he teamed up with Richard Rodgers in 1942 to work on *Oklahoma*!, he had already collaborated on forty-five musicals, including the groundbreaking *Show Boat* with Jerome Kern. Together, Rodgers and Hammerstein would set the standard for the "musical play" for the next two decades, churning out nine memorable productions for the stage (in addition to *Oklahoma*,' they wrote *Carousel, Allegro, South Pacific, The King and I, Me and Juliet, Pipe Dream, Flower Dram Song, and The Sound Of Music*), the film musical State Fair, and the television production *Cinderella*. Hammerstein's lyrics are known not for their clever wit but for their simplicity and directness, their sincere emotion. He took great pains to make smooth transitions between the spoken dialogue of his plays and the songs. Sometimes Rodgers would write the music first and Hammerstein fit the lyrics to it, and at other times Hammerstein created the mood and rhythm in his lyrics and then Rodgers, always one who composed quickly, would in a day or so compose the music for it. Their partnership was known for its compatibility and fertile productivity and for their congeniality toward their casts. Oscar Hammerstein II died in 1960, Richard Rodgers in 1979.

Plot Summary

In Bangkok, Siam (which would later come to be known as Thailand), in 1862, a strong-willed, widowed schoolteacher, Anna Leonowens, arrives at the request of the King of Siam to tutor his many children. Anna's young son, Louis, fears the severe countenance of the King's "Prime Minister" the Kralahome, but Anna refuses to be intimidated. She teaches her son to "Whistle a Happy Tune" whenever he is afraid. The Kralahome escorts them to the palace; he rides on a carried chair, while Anna and her son follow on foot behind him. Anna is bristling to confront the King about his broken promise regarding a house for Louis and herself outside of the palace walls. As they await an audience, the King receives a gift from the king of Burma, a lovely girl named Tuptim. The King sends her off to his harem of wives, dismissing the young man who delivered the gift, Lun Tha, who has fallen deeply in love with Tuptim. The King turns to go, so Anna marches up to him, demanding to be heard. She is taken aback by the King's dominance, as he claps his hands and orders her to "stand here" to meet the royal children. Anna plans to depart on the waiting ship if she does not get what has been promised to her, but she is so taken with the children that she decides she will stay. She announces that she will pursue the topic of the house later.

For the next several weeks, Anna proceeds to teach the children songs, proverbs, and poems all having to do with longing for a home. The King recognizes her subterfuge and refuses to supply the house. The handful of wives who also have been allowed to partake of Anna's teaching continually refer to Anna as "Sir." When she asks them why, Lady Thiang, the King's number one wife, explains "because you scientific, not lowly like woman." Tuptim reveals her secret love for Lun Tha to Anna, and Anna sings "Hello, Young Lovers," in sympathy for the star-crossed couple.

The King is quite pleased with Anna's teaching. His eldest son Prince Chulalongkorn has some concerns, however. The young prince asks his father when he will know he knows everything and thus be ready to rule. This prompts the King to sing "A Puzzlement," in which he expresses his own doubts about how best to bring justice and knowledge to his people. In the meantime, Anna confirms that she loves the children, singing to them "Getting to Know You," a song about the joys of new friendship. Then she launches into a new lesson on geography, having just received a more accurate map from England. The new map shows Siam in its proper size in relation to other countries. She has to end her lesson prematurely, though, when Prince Chulalongkorn refuses to believe that Siam is so small and that there is such a substance as snow. His father rescues Anna by ordering the children to believe her.

The Kralahome demands that Anna cease encouraging the King to modernize; he foresees danger ahead because he thinks that the King will not be able to lead effectively if he loses his authoritarian style. When Anna disregards this warning, the Kralahome retorts by predicting she'll become the King's slave. As if to confirm this, the King sends for Anna in the middle of the night and demands that she take a letter. During this menial task, to which Anna submits because she is charmed by the King's desire to write to Abraham Lincoln, the King extracts from Anna the promise that she will

conform to the tradition of never letting her head be higher than the King's. In spite of her scientific and liberal beliefs, Anna promises to comply.

During another confrontation between Anna and the King, he finally articulates the phrase that Anna least wants to hear, "You are my servant!" Now Anna can no longer pretend to herself that she has not submitted to the King's will, and she threatens to leave, saying "I cannot stay in a country where a promise has no meaning.' Anna is awaiting the next available ship when Lady Thiang comes to seek Anna's help in advising the King on a new matter of great urgency. She sings "Something Wonderful," expressing her way of loving a man who is both brutal and unexpectedly generous. Anna recognizes the wisdom and grace of Lady Thiang's kind of love.

Anna agrees to go to the King and to protect his male ego by acting as though she is not there to help him. The problem is that rumors have reached Queen Victoria that the King of Siam is a barbarian. If that is the case, or even if the perception is generally accepted, then the Queen will have little trouble making a protectorate of Siam. The King cleverly demands that Anna "guess" what he should do, thus opening the door for her to give him some much-needed advice. She guesses that he will entertain the British Ambassador and the prominent British citizens of Bangkok, to demonstrate his civility. The King is elated and he rushes all of his women, Anna included, off to the Buddhist in order to pray for success. Amid his wishes and demands that Anna supervise sewing European dresses for each of his many wives, he at last promises to give Anna her house

The European style dinner and entertainment have the desired effect. Tuptim has written a play for the entertainment of the notables, an Asian-style version of Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The guests find the King witty, love Tuptim's play, and toast the continued sovereignty of Siam. The King has won. However, he is disturbed by the note of rebellion he and Anna each have detected in Tuptim's play. The cruel Simon Legree, whom Tuptim has transformed into a King rather than the plantation owner he was in Stowe's novel, drowns in the pursuit of the escaped slave Eliza. The King knows that Tuptim is unhappy in his court and resents her expressing rebellion in this way. He initiates a search of the palace so that he may reprimand her, but she has fled with Lun Tha. As the guards continue their search, the King and Anna celebrate their victory by dancing a polka together. They are abruptly interrupted by the guards carrying a screaming Tuptim. The King furiously prepares to beat her himself, but Anna appeals to him to contain his anger and refuses to leave the room. The King cannot bring himself to whip the girl in front of Anna and runs offstage. The Kralahome snarls at Anna that she has destroyed the King. At this painful moment more bad news arrives the guards have found Lun Tha's drowned body in the river.

Once again Anna is awaiting the arrival of a ship to take her home to England. Lady Thiang once again arrives to plead with Anna to overcome her pride and visit the King. This time the situation is more grave; he is dying, having refused nourishment for many weeks. Lady Thiang hands Anna a letter that the King has managed to write her. In it he declares his admiration for Anna, who has been "much trouble" but who has affected him greatly. She runs to his side.

The children are brought in to their father. One child recites a letter to Anna begging her not to leave. Anna decides to send Louis to the ship to retrieve their luggage. She will stay after all.

Young Prince Chulalongkorn fears being made King before he is ready. The dying King asks him what he would do first as a ruler. As the prince explains his proclamation abolishing the traditional groveling bow, an idea clearly influenced by Anna, the King dies. Anna reverently kisses the hand of the dead king.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The King and I is the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical about a British schoolteacher, named Anna Leonowens, and her nine-year-old son, Louis, who travel to Siam to instruct the king's children. Set in the mid 1860's, the play addresses slavery, British imperialism, and women's issues. The musical is one of eleven, written by Rodgers and Hammerstein. Many of the songs in the production are recognized as theatre classics.

The play opens on the deck of a ship called the Chow Phya, which has sailed from Singapore to Siam and is approaching the port of Bangkok. Anna and Louis Leonowens are on board the ship destined for Bangkok, where Anna will become schoolteacher to the king's children.

The captain of the ship is Captain Orton. He talks to Louis, who is excited to see the lights of Bangkok, as the ship approaches land. Louis calls to his mother, Anna, who shares in Louis' excitement that they will soon be landing in Siam. Louis catches sight of a long, low boat with a dragon's head. Captain Orton informs him that it is the Royal Barge carrying the Kralahome of Siam. He is the king's right hand man, who functions as a prime minister.

Captain Orton tells Louis that the Royal Barge will meet their ship in port, and the kralahome will come aboard to welcome Louis and his mother. Captain Orton cautions Anna about the power that the kralahome wields and urges her to be careful in her dealings with him. The Royal Barge is catching up to the ship, and Louis is amazed to see that the kralahome and the other court members are nearly naked. Anna cautions Louis that, although the people look different, the two of them are not to be afraid.

Anna tells Louis that whenever she is afraid, she whistles. She then launches into a song called, "Whistle a Happy Tune." As Louis and Anna finish their song, four Siamese slaves have boarded the ship followed by the kralahome and an interpreter, who tells Anna that she and Louis are to accompany him to the palace. There, they will take up residence.

Anna balks at this plan, because the king had promised her a separate home near the palace. The city is celebrating the New Year, and the king is preoccupied with the festivities. This prevents any visit from Anna, who will have to wait for an audience. Resigned to her immediate fate, Anna bids Captain Orton farewell and walks down the gangway and off the ship.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

Rodgers and Hammerstein based this musical on a book entitled, *Anna and the King of Siam*, written by Margaret Landon. The composers built on the classic theme of unlikely

romance by introducing songs to make the production a musical presentation, which means that songs are used to express emotions and to convey dialogue at different points in the production. The first of these, "Whistle a Happy Tune" appears in this scene and conveys the message that Anna and Louis are apprehensive about embarking on their new life. However, their fears will be minimized, if they ignore them and whistle like nothing bothers them. This is a typical literary technique used in musical theatre and is much more entertaining than if Anna and Louis were to merely have a discussion about their fears.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

The king sits cross-legged in his study in the palace, dictating letters, as the kralahome enters the room. The kralahome tells the king that the schoolteacher has been in Siam almost three weeks and is waiting for an audience with the king to discuss her job and her promise of a private home. The king does not recall any such promise but agrees to see Anna.

The king is interrupted by the entrance of a man named Lun Tha, an emissary from Burma, who is going to copy the Bangkok temple. Lun Tha has also brought with him a young woman named Tuptim, a gift to the king from the Prince of Burma. The king is suspicious that Tuptim is a spy, but ultimately approves of her and leaves the room.

Tuptim breaks into song, revealing that although she is glad to please the king, she is in love with another man. The king returns to the room, where Anna is ushered in and introduced by the kralahome as the new schoolteacher for the palace children. Anna wants to discuss the matter of her home, but the king is intent on educating her on his purpose for bringing her here.

The king wants to assimilate parts of Western culture into the country of Siam. Educating the children in Western language and knowledge is the most direct way to accomplish the goal. Anna informs the king that she is aware of his plan, a fact that pleases the king. He labels Anna as a scientific woman.

Anna finds a way to open the topic of her home and tells the king that she and Louis are comfortable in their palace apartment. However, they do not like the guards and restrictions. They would much prefer to have their own home, as promised. Anna and Louis have watched "New Year celebrations, royal cremation ceremonies, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera."

The king is intrigued by the term, "etcetera," which Anna describes to him as meaning "all the things you have been doing while we have been waiting."

The king orders the kralahome to have the children brought in to meet Anna. The king has sixty-seven children, but only those whose mothers are in favor with the king at present will be educated. The king is interrupted by the arrival of Lady Thiang, the king's head wife, who has been designated to help Anna with the education of the children, in exchange for which she will be taught to speak English. The king makes note of Tuptim's admirable command of the English language, and Tuptim asks Anna if she can provide her with the book, "The Small House of Uncle Thomas" by American author, "Harriet Beecher Stowa." Anna comments on the book's theme of slavery, and the king notes that he is aligned with "President Lingkong" against slavery.

Once more, Anna presses the issue of her house. The king runs out of patience with the demands and orders Anna to talk to his wives. The king abruptly leaves the room, with Tuptim following closely behind him.

The other women of the court press in on Anna to investigate her strange clothing and ask questions about her little boy and dead husband. Lady Thiang addresses Anna as "sir," because Anna is scientific and not at all like the Siamese women. Lady Thiang also tells Anna that Tuptim is ill-fated. She will never again see the man she truly loves, because the king has found favor with her.

Anna confides in Lady Thiang that a woman cannot help who she loves and that she herself was very much in love with her dead husband, Tom. Anna begins to sing "Hello Young Lovers," a ballad about the thrills and anticipation of being young and in love.

The king re-enters the room, followed by the children, who greet Anna one-by-one. Finally, Anna is surrounded by the children, with whom she is immediately enamored. The promise of her own home momentarily forgotten, Anna agrees to stay and teach the children.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The author introduces elements that help to place the drama in historical accuracy. The most obvious one is the mention of "The Small House of Uncle Thomas," which is actually the famous novel "Uncle Tom's Cabin" written prior to the Civil War in America. The topic of slavery is the plot of that book, which parallels life in Siam at the time as well. The king prides himself on being progressive in that he understands the trials of "President Lingkong," or President Lincoln.

The issue of women's subservient roles is introduced in this scene, as Lady Thiang tells Anna that she is not like the Siamese women, who are kept uneducated. The king's first encounter with Anna, an independent woman, is something he both wants for the sake of education but dislikes for the disruption to tradition.

The author also uses foreshadowing, when Lady Thiang tells Anna that Tuptim will never be united with the man she truly loves. Lady Thiang may not be formally educated, but she can understand women's roles and fates better than any other can.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

On the palace grounds, the schoolchildren sing "Home Sweet Home," as the king fumes to his oldest son, Chulalongkorn, that each of Anna's school lessons seems to have a reference to "home." The king will not be moved by this ploy of Anna's and probes Chulalongkorn for other knowledge that he has acquired recently.

Chulalongkorn tells his father that the world is a big ball with a stick in it, and the king half-heartedly agrees. Chulalongkorn is worried that he will one day be king and not know everything. The king dismisses his son and sings the song, "A Puzzlement," about his own uncertainty, despite his royal position.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

This scene addresses the theme of tradition in Siam as represented by the king and his oldest son, who will succeed him. The king wants Siam to become more progressive so that it may compete and trade in the world. He is also torn by the new ways of thinking, which will have to be adapted in order for this to take place. The son represents the future. His willingness to grow, learn, and admit that he does not know everything bodes well for the future of the country, as a whole.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

Anna is busy in the palace schoolroom. Today's lesson focuses on a new map which shows the Siam of 1862 in relationship to the rest of the world. The children are shocked to see the relatively small size of Siam, as opposed to their previous beliefs of it being a huge country. Anna points out England in comparison. The children are pleased to see that it is smaller than Siam.

Anna shares with the children that before she came to Siam, she had no knowledge of the country or the people. Now that she has lived there for more than a year, she is learning to understand them. Anna launches into the song, "Getting to Know You," which expresses her delight in knowing the people of Siam and in hoping that they like her in return.

Anna dances with the children, while they all sing. She soon remembers that she is in the middle of a school lesson. Chulalongkorn points to a place on the new map, and Anna identifies it as Norway. The children are amazed at her description of snow and frozen rivers on which people may walk in the winter.

The children are incredulous about snow and ice. This information, compounded by the children's disbelief of Siam's true size, causes an uproar in the classroom. The king enters, and Anna tries to explain the furor caused by the topic of snow. The king hesitantly agrees with Anna and demands that the children will believe everything Anna teaches them from this day on.

Anna takes this opportunity to once more remind the king of his promise to provide her with a home. The king is outraged at the introduction of this subject again, yells at Anna that he does not remember, and tells her to not mention it again. The king tells Anna that she must remember her place as his servant, a statement that immediately brings Anna to a fury. Anna declares that if the king does not provide the house he had promised, she will return to England. The children begin to plead for Anna to stay. The king offers servants to Anna, but she resolutely declines.

Anna tells the king that she loves the children but that she cannot stay in a country where a promise has no merit or weight. Anna leaves the room in a swell of tears, and the king paces the floor. He declares that he does not need Anna, and then leaves the room.

Suddenly, Tuptim enters the room and settles on the floor with a book. Lun Tha runs in asking for Anna, and Tuptim tells him that Anna has quarreled with the king and left. This concerns Lun Tha, because Anna has helped him and Tuptim to meet in secret. Tuptim cautions Lun Tha not to talk openly to her and to pretend that he is waiting for Anna to return. Lun Tha begins to sing, "We Kiss in a Shadow," which tells the angst of

the two young lovers, who must meet in secret. Unbeknownst to Tuptim and Lun Tha, Lady Thiang sees the young couple together and goes away quietly.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

The king is once again caught in the dilemma of wanting to westernize his country through education, and his need to be thought all knowing among his people. Reluctantly, the king accedes to Anna and instructs the children to believe her unconditionally, a feat with which he struggles. The king is not accustomed to defending his honor. Anna's declaration that his promises mean nothing shakes him even further than his already vulnerable psyche can bear.

The instruction of snow and ice in Norway is a topic used in foreshadowing, which will come into relevance at the end of the production. There is also foreshadowing in Lady Thiang's discovery of Tuptim and Lun Tha, which will result in dire consequences by the end of the drama as well.

Act 1, Scene 5

Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

Anna is alone in her bedroom in the palace. She addresses the king in anger, as if he were standing there. Anna is still outraged that the king had called her his servant. She launches into a song about the backward and sometimes barbaric customs of Siam which she has endured during her stay here.

Lady Thiang enters the room and asks if Anna will go to the king. He is emotionally wounded, because no one has ever talked to him like Anna talked to him earlier today. Anna contends that no one has ever spoken to her in such a manner as the king did, either.

Lady Thiang informs Anna that Siamese agents in Singapore have discovered letters sent to the British government. They contained the message that the Siamese king is a barbarian, and the country is perfectly positioned to become a British protectorate.

Despite her anger at the king, she declares that he is definitely not a barbarian, and she agrees to Lady Thiang's request that Anna visit the king. Lady Thiang cautions Anna that her visit must not appear to take the form of advice, and that she must bring up the topic of the British situation so that his pride will not be further wounded.

Lady Thiang is grateful for Anna's help, because she knows that Anna is better equipped to meet the king's needs in this area than she is. Lady Thiang begins to sing, "Something Wonderful," which outlines the king's stubborn nature including his demanding, petulant behavior, which is contrasted by the fact that he is simply a man with fears and dreams like any other man.

Lady Thiang leaves the bedroom, encounters the kralahome, and tells him to tell the king that Anna will come to him, because she needs him. Lady Thiang sings once more, realizing that Anna and the king have fallen in love.

Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

The author uses the literary technique of irony in this scene between Lady Thiang and Anna. Up until this point, it has been Anna who has been set apart for her wisdom and worldliness in comparison to the Siamese women. Now it is Lady Thiang who shows the most wisdom and insight in knowing how to bring positive closure to the situation between Anna and the king.

Historically, at this period in time, Queen Victoria is in an expansion mode. Taking over countries like Siam is Britain's goal toward imperialism. Control of the ports and waterways of Siam would add to Britain's trading superiority in the world, adding even

more power to this powerful nation. The letter mentioned by Lady Thiang echoes the current events of the British Imperialism movement.

Act 1, Scene 6

Act 1, Scene 6 Summary

Anna approaches the king, who is in his study reading the Bible. Anna challenges the king on faith versus fact. The king assumes that Anna has come to apologize for her behavior and quickly turns the conversation to Lincoln's problems related to the Civil War. The king would like to send some elephants to America to help in the war effort and asks Anna to write the letter stating this offer.

The king demands that Anna sit lower than he is, because no one's head should ever be higher than the king's at any time. Anna lowers herself to the floor and finds the opportunity to broach the topic of the British letter declaring the king a barbarian. Anna craftily tells the king that if it were her in this situation, she would make sure that Queen Victoria knows that Siam is not ruled by a barbarian.

The king is ready to fight the British ambassador, Sir Edward Ramsay, who will be visiting soon, but Anna convinces the king that it will be wiser to put Siam's best foot forward. Anna and the king agree to a plan, where the men and women of the palace shall dress and act in the European manner while Ramsay is visiting. This will indicate that Siam is cultured and civilized and will not be vulnerable to acquisition by Great Britain.

The plan calls for the immediate sewing of dresses for all the women. The king wakes the palace so that work may begin. Anna wonders how much time they will have to complete the job. The king asserts that Ramsay will probably arrive in a week, depending on how many other port cities he visits along the way. In addition to the European dress and manners, Anna suggests that the king host a fine dinner and ball to entertain Sir Ramsay and his guests. The king offers up a theatrical performance as more entertainment, as Tuptim has recently completed a play based on *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

As the king shouts out the orders for the makings of the celebration, the palace residents see fireworks exploding overhead. The kralahome tells the king that the fireworks are in salute to Sir Ramsay's approaching ship. This news puts new panic into the plan, and the king demands that Sir Ramsay be given sightseeing tours to allow the women more hours to sew all the necessary clothes. The king enlists the help of Buddha and the palace residents echo his prayers to help with the event. The king also promises to give Anna a house of her own, if the event is successful. Both Anna and the king kneel in prayer and eye each other warily.

Act 1, Scene 6 Analysis

Despite his anger at Anna, the king is immersing himself in Western history and religion. The king knows that the only way to maintain his country's independence is to become

more aware of Western civilization. This trend is also exhibited in Anna's encouragement that the palace residents are made to appear European. This is consistent with the thinking at this period in time that Orientals were not as educated and did not have proper religious training. Making a country such as Siam a protectorate of Great Britain was actually perceived to be a benevolent act by the British. Ironically, Anna, who is British, knows exactly how to help the king execute a plan, which will thwart the motives of her homeland.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

The schoolroom functions as a dressing room tonight, where all the women of the palace are changing into their new European style dresses. Makeup artists are applying pale cosmetics to the women's faces, so that they will appear to be of European heritage. The women are baffled by the excessive material and hoops in their skirts and sing a song about the irony of trying to appear civilized to a group of people who wear such ridiculous clothes and abide by silly rituals every day.

The only item not addressed is the lack of undergarments for the women, who are not accustomed to such items. As they curtsy at Sir Ramsay's arrival, their lack of skill navigating the hoop skirts creates indelicate scenes, but Sir Ramsay chooses not to dwell on the matter. Sir Ramsay had courted Anna before she married her husband. The king, not appreciating the familiarity between the two, announces that it is time for dinner.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

The author uses the technique of humor in this scene, as the women struggle with the yards of fabrics and hoops in their wide skirts. It is the ultimate culture clash, as the women kneel in honor of the king unaware that their hoops rise up and reveal areas uncovered by traditional undergarments.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Tuptim sneaks across the palace grounds and is startled at the appearance of Lady Thiang, who tells the young woman that the king and his guests are going to the theater pavilion to watch her play. Lady Thiang does not believe Tuptim's excuse that she has come outside to study her lines and tells the girl that she knows of her secret love with Lun Tha. Lady Thiang tells Tuptim that Lun Tha will be sent away from Siam tonight and leaves to make her way to the theater.

Lun Tha enters secretively and tells Tuptim that he will be sailing on the ship to Burma tonight and that he wants Tuptim to accompany him. Tuptim is to meet Lun Tha at this same place at the conclusion of her play. Lun Tha sings, "I Have Dreamed," which tells of all the things he has imagined can come true by being close to his love, Tuptim.

Anna walks in on the two lovers and warns them that their behavior is reckless. Tuptim rushes away to the theater, and Lun Tha reveals to Anna that he and Tuptim will run away tonight. Anna wishes Lun Tha God's blessing, as he leaves and once again sings, "Hello Young Lovers."

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

Lady Thiang has made arrangements for Lun Tha to be sent away to prevent any possible relationship with Tuptim, which will displease the king. Lady Thiang's loyalty to the king takes precedence over everything, and she is calculating in her attempts to keep the palace household working smoothly. Ironically, it is Anna who shows the romantic inclinations. This is in spite of her prim profession as a schoolteacher.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

The king and his British guests assemble in the theater to watch Tuptim's production of "The Small House of Uncle Thomas," in which the issue of slavery is portrayed by the royal singers and dancers. The lessons of snow and ice come into play in Tuptim's drama. Buddha is given credit for the slave Eliza being able to walk across the frozen Ohio River to freedom.

In Tuptim's play, Buddha also gets credit for sending sun to melt the frozen river and drowning the evil king, Simon Legree. Unfortunately, Buddha also exerts his will and takes Little Eva to heaven to be with him. The play finishes on this sad note, but the audience is enthusiastically appreciative of the program.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

The foreshadowing of Anna's lesson about Norwegian snow and ice earlier in the musical has reappeared in Tuptim's drama. The westernization process is well underway with the choice of script topic and the implementation of Anna's information into Tuptim's script.

The theme of rebellion against slavery is the topic of Tuptim's play and also a subliminal message, as the king does not appreciate the idea of any king drowning in pursuit of a runaway slave. This disrespect will not bode well for Tuptim, whose show of rebellious nature has not gone unheeded by the king.

Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

Anna, Sir Ramsay and the king are in the king's study discussing the success of the evening's events. Sir Ramsay particularly likes Tuptim's play, but the king vows that Tuptim will know of his displeasure of the portrayal of the drowned king in the drama. Sir Ramsay is anxious to report the king's civilized nature and kingdom and departs the room.

The king presents Anna with a ring, which she slips onto the index finger of her left hand. The two share a few awkward moments of silence. Soon, the kralahome interrupts Anna and the king to tell him that Tuptim has tried to escape. The secret police are in pursuit. The kralahome agrees to keep the king abreast of the events surrounding Tuptim's capture and leaves the room.

Anna questions the king about what will happen to Tuptim and implores him to give the girl a chance to explain her situation and unhappy life at the palace. The king accuses Anna of being too sentimental, but Anna persists in trying to get the king to understand that each person has many facets and that love is an important one.

The mention of the thrill that a young lady gets when asked to dance results in Anna and the king dancing to the song, "Shall We Dance." Before long, the kralahome interrupts to announce that Tuptim has been found and is being questioned by the secret police. Tuptim is suddenly thrown into the king's study, and she begs Anna to intercede on her behalf. Tuptim refuses to divulge any information about Lun Tha, so she is stripped to the waist so that one of the guards may whip her naked back. Anna tries to intervene, which enrages the king, who claims that he will whip the girl. Anna calls him a barbarian for his act and, just as he raises the whip, the king catches Anna's intense gaze. He leaves the room. Tuptim is taken from the room by the guards, just as the interpreter enters to inform them that Lun Tha has been found dead. Tuptim vows to join her lover very soon, and the guards drag her away. Anna tells the kralahome that she will be leaving on the next boat out of Bangkok, regardless of its destination, and gives the king's ring to the kralahome to return it to him.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

Although the evening's events have been a success, and the king will be declared civilized back in England, the events surrounding Tuptim's escape and capture belie the king's true nature. Supreme rule and obedience are difficult traditions to give up, and the king proves that he is no different from any other ruler in his need for established practices over the chaos of change. Although he embraces change, no one else in the palace is allowed individual thought or free will. The king has many women at his

disposal, but Tuptim's rejection pushes him over the edge of reason. It undoes all the progress he has made up to this point in becoming more civilized.

Act 2, Scene 5

Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

Lady Thiang waits in a room of Anna's home, where Chulalongkorn enters to say that it is believed that Anna and Louis have already left for their boat. Lady Thiang is confident that Anna has not yet left and takes this time to inform Chulalongkorn that the king is dying from a weakened heart. This information frightens Chulalongkorn, who does not feel ready to become king.

Chulalongkorn gains some confidence from the lessons Anna has taught, and Lady Thiang advises him to remember the lessons and the teacher. Anna and Louis enter the room, and Lady Thiang implores Anna to visit with the king. He had attempted to write Anna a letter in which he thanks her for her friendship and wise counsel. Anna is overcome with emotion and rushes from the room.

Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

Once more, it is Lady Thiang, who shows great wisdom in the matters of the kingdom and of the heart. It is symbolic that the king is dying from a weakened heart because of his inability to speak of his love for Anna.

Anna's work is almost complete, as her greatest role was to instruct the palace children to embrace knowledge of all people and cultures. Chulalongkorn's embracing of her teachings will ultimately guide the entire kingdom.

Act 2, Scene 6

Act 2, Scene 6 Summary

It has been many months since the king and Anna have seen each other. The king does not understand why Anna wants to leave Siam, when she loves the palace children so much. The children enter the king's study to declare their love for their dying father. However, their attentions are diverted by the sight of Anna, whom they love and do not want to leave.

The king senses Chulalongkorn's apprehension at succeeding his father and asks his son what his first ordinance will be. Chulalongkorn tells his father that he will abolish the outdated practice of bowing in subservience to the king. The king blames Anna for this new way of thinking, and Anna is pleased to take credit for the revolutionary idea.

The king bids everyone in the room to rise out of respect for Chulalongkorn's new rule, then sinks back into his bed, and dies. As Chulalongkorn paces the room, declaring new rules, Anna and the kralahome realize that the king has died. Anna kisses the hand of the deceased king, while the other women in the room curtsy in European style to Chulalongkorn, the new king of Siam.

Act 2, Scene 6 Analysis

The ill-fated and unlikely love story between Anna and the king comes to an end, but Anna's impact will have far-reaching effects through her teachings, which Chulalongkorn will enact. The king remained in conflict with change up to his dying breath but his influence will be felt, because he permitted the idea of change to root and grow. The personal metamorphosis the king experienced over the course of the musical was notable, but it will be Anna and Chulalongkorn who will implement the revolutionary ideas making Siam a truly civilized and political country.

Characters

British Ambassador

The British Ambassador comes to the royal palace in Bangkok expecting to confirm the rumors of the King's barbarity. He is delighted to find him a civilized and learned man. The Ambassador declares in a toast to the King that he will carry the message to Queen Victoria that Siam is quite capable of remaining a sovereign nation.

Eliza

Eliza plays the runaway slave in the play-within-a-play written by the slave Tuptim. In traditional Asian dress Eliza dances and pantomimes scenes of escape from wicked Simon Legree.

Keeper of the Dogs

The Keeper of the Dogs dances a ballet chase of Eliza, across the frozen river, which miraculously melts and drowns him, his dogs, and Simon Legree.

Simon Legree

Wicked Simon Legree is a plantation slave owner in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel. Tuptim converts him to a king in her adaptation, a more direct reference to the King of Siam, who angrily recognizes himself in the portrayal of the tyrannical ruler.

Anna Leonowens

Anna, a British governess has come to Siam at the request of the King. She is to teach his many young children about the world. She brings with her Louis, her nine- or ten-year-old son and a photograph of her beloved dead husband, Tom. Anna is a strong-willed woman who shows her character immediately by demanding that the King provide her with the house outside the palace walls that she had stipulated in her negotiations with him. She is also a warm-hearted woman, however, and the instant she meets the King's charming children, she submits to live in the palace "for now." She makes it clear, however, that the issue of the separate home is not over. In other ways, too, Anna defies the authority and machismo of the King, as when she deliberately orders a new map to replace the King's map that showed Siam in exaggerated proportions. She is, as the King wanted her to be, a "scientific person" which is why the King's many wives and children insist on calling her' "Sir." Lady Thiang explains that they call her this because she is "scientific, not lowly like woman." Throughout the play, Anna's soft-hearted, womanly side vies with her precise, rational side in dealing with the

King's traditional, chauvinistic attitude toward all women, even her. She finally wins her battle with the King for a house, but she does so through womanly charm rather than through scientific logic.

Louis Leonowens

Louis is the nine- or ten-year-old son of Anna. He plays a rather small role in the play, mostly serving as the civilized and rather timid counterpart to the more robust and feisty Prince Chulalongkorn. In the first scene Louis expresses fear for the severe looking, "half-naked" Kralahome, so his mother shows him her method for overcoming fear to "Whistle a Happy Tune"; at the end of the play Louis worries about missing the boat home. He's a typical British schoolboy of the upper class.

Lun Tha

Lun Tha is a Burmese man charged with delivering the Burmese King's gift to the King of Siam a beautiful and intelligent young woman named Tuptim. He makes his delivery, but not before falling completely in love with Tuptim. He risks his life just for moments with her and later runs away with her when the palace is occupied with the British visitors. After Tuptim is captured by the angry King, Lun Tha is found drowned in the river.

The King

The King of Siam is a study in nineteenth-century contrasts. He is at once the patriarchal and despotic leader, unused to being defied and quick to anger; yet he is also a budding cosmopolitan leader, eager to learn the ways of the "scientific" modern world he wants his country to join. He thinks of himself as an innovative and open-minded leader, but, as Anna finds, he is blindly tied to traditional ways of thinking and acting. He is intelligent enough to read the Bible and find parallels between the words of Moses and new scientific thinking, but also brutal enough to want to beat an unhappy slave for running away. His chauvinism prevents him from directly seeking the advice he knows that Anna can pro vide him, so he cleverly challenges her to "guess" what he plans to do to impress the British Ambassador, and then implements her ideas as his own. The King pro'ves that he does, after all, have a heart, when he allows himself to waste away and die after Lun Tha drowns. He cannot manage to cross the chasm between his traditional, outmoded oriental world and the new, scientific world that Anna represents. He has to die so that his son, Prince Chulalongkorn, can take Siam into its future.

Kralahome

The Kralahome is the Siamese version of a Prime Minister the King's most trusted advisor. The Kralahome greets Anna's ship and escorts her and her son to the palace.

Anna quickly learns the station of women in Siamese society because he rides in a slave-carried chair while she walks behind. The Kralahome's severe demeanor and looks frighten young Louis, but Anna refuses to be bullied by him, even when he demands that she stop encouraging the King to become something he is not a cosmopolitan and egalitarian leader. When the king falls ill, Kralahome blames Anna for destroying him,

Prince Chulalongkorn

The young Prince is a wonderful combination of his father's self-assured leadership and his mother's careful wisdom. Prince Chulalongkorn brings to Anna's classroom a healthy skepticism and a junior version of his father's arrogance. Prince Chulalongkorn bridles at the geography lesson which reveals Siam to be smaller than he'd thought, then rebels and refuses to believe in snow, turning the classroom to pandemonium until his father orders the children to believe the schoolteacher. While the king is dying, the young prince makes his first proclamations, one of which is to abolish the established tradition of bowing low to the ground "like a toad"; instead, he wants his people to show their respect with straight backs and a confident look in their eyes. His display of command and concern for his people demonstrate his readiness to rule as well as his successful assimilation of modern Western thought.

George Ramsay

George Ramsay accompanies the British Ambassador on his fact-finding mission because he once loved Anna Leonowens and hopes to win her back. He had proposed marriage to her once in London; now he is prepared to renew his offer. He accepts Anna's rebuff with the dignity of an Englishman and the resignation of a man who does not love intensely enough to feel much regret.

Ship's Captain

The Ship's Captain helps to set the scene of *The King and I* by warning Anna Leonowens about the unnamed dangers that an Englishwoman alone with her young son may face in Siam. He tells her that the Kralahome (the Siamese "Prime Minister") who has been sent to escort Anna to the palace, is a powerful man of whom she must beware. The Captain several times offers to take Anna back with him, but his chauvinistic concerns and patronizing attitude do not faze Anna.

Lady Thiang

Lady Thiang is the King's "number one wife." She is the mother of Prince Chulalongkorn, the heir to the throne, and the most dignified, poised, well-educated, and wise of his many wives. She forms a fast friendship with Anna. Lady Thiang is a ready pupil for Anna's teaching, but she, like the King, has many traditional ways and

views that clash with Anna's modern ideas. By the end of the play, she teaches the worldly schoolteacher about her way of loving to accept the faults of her husband and to love him because of the moments when he is "wonderful" and because he needs her.

Tuptim

Tuptim is the beautiful gift that the king of Burma has delivered to the King of Siam, who makes her his newest wife. She is mocked by the other wives, who cannot understand how she could possibly be unhappy in the king's luscious palace. Tuptim, however, loves Lun Tha. She tries not to fall in love with him, knowing she is fated to be given away, but she cannot help herself. She befriends Anna and receives comfort from her, as well as English books to read. One of these is Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The story of the runaway slave appeals to Tuptim, and she writes an adaptation of the story for presentation after dinner to the King's important British dinner guests. The guests love her saucy blend of American ideology with Asian culture and style, but the King perceives the note of rebellion in the death of the wicked King Simon Legree. Under cover of the evening's festivities, Tuptim runs away with Lun Tha, but she is quickly caught and brought to the king. Only the intervention of her friend Anna prevents her from being cruelly beaten for her insubordination. The news of Lun Tha's death crushes her.

Themes

Custom and Tradition

The King of Siam announces from the very beginning of *The King and 1* that he wants to lead Siam into the modern world. He says "Siam is to be modern, scientific country." However, when it comes to renouncing traditional attitudes in order to replace them with modern thinking, the King himself is the last to change. He maintains a chauvinistic posture toward women and his subjects, snapping his fingers to call them to attention or to do his bidding. He might admire Abraham Lincoln and express agreement with abolishing slavery, but he is blind to the slavery in his own palace. Anna chides the King for treating Tuptim like a possession, just "a bowl of rice," Then she realizes that he treats her, an English schoolteacher, in the same way, presumptuously demanding that she "take a letter" for him and ordering her about as though she were one of his wives or slaves. Anna tolerates his behavior because she understands that habits are difficult to change, even when one wants to embrace new ideas. She also understands that her modern attitude about women threatens his sense of manhood. The King respects Anna and recognizes the value of her opinions, but he refuses to ask for them, for to do so would raise a woman to equal status with him. When considering how to resist England's making a protectorate of Siam, he cannot bring himself to ask Anna for advice. Instead he pretends to have her play a guessing game so that he can adopt her guess as his plan. To combat the sense that Anna is indeed gaining in status with him, he demands that she follow the custom never to let her head be higher than his. He tests her by dropping nearly prostrate on the floor, and when she hesitates he reminds her that "a promise is a promise." The custom and traditions of old Siam are so deeply embedded in the ambitious King that his death is a necessity to allow his more flexible young son to carry Siam the next step forward.

Culture Clash

The Ship Captain warns Anna of the unnamed dangers that threaten an Englishwoman alone in Bangkok. He expects harm to come of this confrontation between Western and Eastern cultures. Of course, the King himself has arranged for it by bringing Anna to his palace to teach his children about the world outside of Siam. What he does not realize is how difficult it will be for him to adapt to Western culture and how much he will have to sacrifice to do so. The play overtly assumes that in this encounter Siam stands to gain in modernity, while England generously and paternalistically contributes values to be adopted. Underlying the culture encounter is an issue of economics. Lady Thiang tells Anna that because of a rumor saying that the King is a barbarian, Queen Victoria may make Siam into a protectorate. The King understands that he would lose his kingdom under a British protectorateship. His goal conflicts with the goal of the British Queen. Queen Victoria wants to develop trade routes and to establish a foothold in

Siam. The King wants to take advantage of British interest in his country to develop Siam into a modern country with a place in world trade but to do so as a sovereign nation that keeps its profits in his coffers, not in England's. These larger issues at stake beneath the culture clash compromise the relationship between Britain and Siam so that they cannot confront each other as equals. Anna acts intellectually and morally superior to the King, proffering advice on how to impress the British government and congratulating him for reading the Bible. She barely tolerates being in the Buddhist temple, as though it was a profane place and not a religious sanctum. The British see the Siamese as culturally inferior but also enticing a possession to be captured and controlled. This enticement is almost sensual, especially in scenes such as when the wives throw their skirts over their heads to run away from the British Ambassador because he "looks like a goat" and when Anna dances with the King with his hand on her waist. Hammerstein's play seems to suggest that if only Siam would submit to the teachings of modern British people like Anna, it would be taken seriously among the world powers. It could always save its cultural heritage in the form of entertainment such as Tuptim' s orientalized version of Western ideology.

Knowledge and Ignorance

With very few exceptions the characters in *The King and I* can be ranked in prestige according to their relative knowledge and ignorance of Western culture. For instance, Tuptim ranks very high because she speaks and reads English; hers is a courageous spirit. She even writes her own play, although she bases it on an American (Western culture) novel. The wives who do not take their learning as seriously as Tuptim behave in a silly, "womanly" manner and ignorantiy make fun of Tuptim for her unhappiness. They irresponsibly paw through Anna's clothing and assume that her body is shaped like her hoop-skirted dresses, while Tuptim politely asks for English books. The Kralahome ranks low because he resists Anna's teaching, even reveals his ignorance by suggesting that the young Prince should not waste his time learning about Western culture because it will make him a less effective leader. The King ranks high because he reads the great books of Western culture, such as the Bible. Anna stands on the pinnacle of knowledge because she dispenses knowledge to others and seldom appears ignorant or in need of teaching herself. Lady Thiang ranks fairly high because she has the most education of all the wives, and she is entrusted by Anna to teach a lesson now and then. Even more importantly, Lady Thiang actually teaches something to Anna. When Lady Thiang comes to convince Anna to help the King strategize how to avoid the protectorateship of Siam, she sings a song about her tolerant love for the imperfect but admirable king. Although Thiang does not impart factual knowledge to Anna, she does impart her special kind of wisdom about love.

Style

Musical

Together Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein produced eleven musicals. *The King and I* was one of their most popular. A musical is a drama with singing, music, and spoken dialogue. The songs express the sentiments of one or more characters and may be addressed directly to other characters in the play. For example, Anna sings "Whistle a Happy Tune" in direct address to her son Louis, and Lady Thiang sings "Something Wonderful" to Anna. Sometimes the song is simply an expression of a character's state of mind, as when the King sings "A Puzzlement."

In the case of some musicals, existing songs are worked into a storyline. The lyrics (by Hammerstein) and music (by Rodgers) for *The King and I* were written specifically for the play, so the songs correspond seamlessly with the narrative. The songs enhance the richness of the action, they are part of the dialogue that moves the plot along, although the songs, dance, and music of *The King and I* could be removed without disrupting the plot line altogether. A musical differs from an opera in this respect, for an opera contains little or no dialogue and limited action, thus the songs must carry the weight of advancing the plot. Musicals such as *Jesus Christ Superstar and The Who's Tommy*, works with little or no spoken dialogue, are called "rock operas," not musicals. The musical enjoyed its heydey between 1920 and 1950, when producers and writing teams such as Rodgers and Hammerstein created dozens of musicals to showcase the talents of such dancing and singing stars as Judy Garland, Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly, and Ginger Rogers. Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals, beginning with their first work together, *Oklahoma*, undertake a more serious topic than the musical comedies of the 1920s and 1930s, and their songs and music are more integrated with the plot. Musicals "came of age" with the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein. The successful 1996 revival of *The King and I*, starring Lou Diamond Phillips as the King, demonstrates that the musical still continues to enjoy great popularity.

Play within a Play

The slave girl Tuptim creates a Siamese version of a book she admires, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. This book would have been making a stir in America in 1862 (the year portrayed in *The King and I*) because it championed the cause of the abolition of slavery, an issue over which American president Abraham Lincoln was waging war with the American South (the Civil War) at the time of Anna's visit to Siam The King admires the self-taught Lincoln and his principles of freedom, so it is ironic that Tuptim's play should offend him. It does, because the King has not recognized the suffering his own brand of slavery inflicts on his wives and subjects. Tuptim intends to shock the King. Hers is a rebellious spirit, and she not only wants to escape, she wants to confront the King's hypocrisy as well. Hammerstein has Tuptim use the same technique as Shakespeare does his title character in *Hamlet*, although her purpose

differs. Hamlet uses his play to "catch the conscience of the king" in order to entrap Claudius and justify murdering him. Tuptim's motives are less clear. She may not have had any particular plan of reprisal in mind nor realized the power of her creation until she saw the King's face. When Tuptim sees that her play has affected the King, she begins urgently to plead the cause of unhappy slaves everywhere, but the King's quick temper immediately cuts her off. The effect of the play within a play in *The King and I* underscores the theme of culture clash and the irony of a leader who wants to modernize his country but cannot bear to modernize himself.

Historical Context

British Imperialism

In the nineteenth century, the British held the point of view that trade was "the true herald of civilization" and that Great Britain's expertise in commerce gave it the right to its leadership role in international trade (Great Britain controlled forty percent of the world's manufactured trade in I860). The Great Exhibition of 1851 in London showcased the world's fascination for technology and trade in a gigantic structure of glass and iron called the Crystal Palace. It housed exotic booty harvested from Britain's colonies and overseas trade inventions, consumer products, and the contributions of many other countries, all crammed on over eight miles of display shelves. Queen Victoria visited the stunning Crystal Palace nearly every day, joined by throngs of pride-filled British subjects, to view the exhibits and to reinforce a sense of manifest superiority in technology and trade.

The Great Exhibition helped to allay any disquiet over the aggressive expansion of the British Empire. And there were reasons for disquiet Just prior to Anna Leonowen's visit to Siam, the two "Opium Wars" (1839-1842 and 1856-1860) were fought in China to secure Britain the dubious right to export opium from India (a colony of the British Empire) into China and to establish British-governed trade posts in China's most active ports. The "treaty-port system" became Great Britain's mode of dominating Chinese trade for the next forty years; it was also used m many other countries not officially colonized into the Empire. In 1855, Siam ceded to diplomatic pressure to sign the Bowring Treaty, which added Siam to Great Britain's extensive "informal empire," by granting Great Britain certain trade advantages as well as the rights to establish a consulate in Bangkok and to try its people in British and not Siamese courts. This agreement granted economic power over Siam and also provided Britain a buffer zone between its South Asian holdings (Malaya and Burma) and the holdings of the French (Indochina), thus making it easier for competing colonizers to cohabitate South Asia. Siam, unlike India, New Zealand, and Burma, retained its sovereign status; however, as Margaret Marshall wrote in the *Nation*, "the divide between empire and influence was often indistinct," and British predominance in education, religion, the economy, and politics took the form of a cultural authority that would change Siam irrevocably.

Orientalism

Besides the obvious naval and trade superiority of nineteenth century Great Britain, cultural stereotyping of non-European peoples contributed to the building of the British Empire upon the backs of Asian, African, and Arab nations. The *Nation's* Marshall wrote that "there can be little doubt that, as British acquaintance with the non-European world grew in the nineteenth century, so did a readiness to be highly critical and even totally dismissive of alien cultures as well as a view that Britain had a mission or national duty to spread the benefits of its civilization, economy, and religion as widely as possible

overseas." Since the eighteenth century, the term "*Orientalism*" had referred to a negative perception of Asia, which Edward Said summarized in Orientalism as "its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability."

This culturally annihilative description in turn justified the Western colonizing agenda, because it made the Orient into "a locale requiring Western attention, reconstruction, even redemption." With the justification of this cultural bias in hand, colonizing "oriental" nations became a gift of civilization granted by British colonizers. It also blinded British subjects to the true nature of Britain's interest in the Orient to establish advantageous trade relationships, obtain inexpensive products and labor, and to hold the Asians in thrall. A more fundamental reason for Orientalism also existed. Often humans make use of foreign "others" as repositories of projected "bad" traits so that the subject's identity remains "clean." Literary critic Said asserted that "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self." Orientalism, then, is a construction of the other that is used to bolster the identity of the speaker the real identity of the subject, the Siamese in the case of Rodgers and Hammerstem's play becomes lost in translation.

American Musicals

The King and I produced in 1951 by Richard Rodgers (music) and Oscar Hammerstein (book, libretto, and lyrics) was part of a new tradition of musical drama. Up until 1927 when Jerome Kern and Hammerstein's *Show Boat* broke the mold of the musical comedy by blending music, lyrics, dance, and libretto, staged musical productions typically consisted of a series of unrelated songs, dances, and comic routines loosely clustered around a simple, even inane, boy-meets-girl plot. With *Show Boat*, the musical came of age. Now songs were integrated into the plot and advanced the action in the same manner that operatic arias did. It took a few years for audiences to appreciate the transformation, but by 1951, the form had sophisticated to the point that most critics were on the lookout for songs that *didn't* have a place in the narrative, although a few still longed nostalgically for the more comedic elements of musical comedies typical of the Ziegfeld Follies days. Rodgers and Hammerstein together would create eleven memorable "musicals" to join the ranks of the dozens of artistic and commercial successes produced by George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Stephen Sondheim, Kurt Weill, and others, as well as the twenty-four musicals Rodgers had created in his partnership with Larry Hart.

Critical Overview

Expectations were high for the latest production by the team of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein when *The King and I* opened at the St. James Theater in New York City in 1951. It earned mostly favorable reviews, with only a few being less than enthusiastic. The lavish sets by Jo Mielziner and costumes by Irene Sharaff created a glamorous backdrop; As David Ewen quoted an admirer in *New Complete Book of American Musical Theater*, the work represented "a flowering of all the arts of the theater with moments that are pure genius."

However, some critics found fault with the boyscout-ish seriousness of the play, especially its melodramatic ending The *New Yorker* reviewer John Lardner liked the exotic touches, but found the play "a little too unremittingly wholesome" and the lyrics too "corny." Lardner disliked the "touch of Walt Disney in all the recent Rodgers and Hammerstein shows." *Nation* reviewer Margaret Marshall lamented that the play took all of actress Gertrude Lawrence's showmanship to prevent the play's drawn-out plot from "sagging too often" but added that "even Miss Lawrence [could] do little with the last scene." A reviewer for *Time* found the "battle of sexes, collision of races and conflict of ideas sometimes touching, and far less insipid than the usual musicomedy romance."

Other reviewers struggled to find words to describe this new musical form that departed from musical comedy in its seriousness of plot and theme. A critic writing in *Harper's* noted that *The King and I* was not billed as a musical comedy but as a "musical play," and suggested that "it might better have been billed as 'a sentimental fantasy with music and a message thrown in.'" Later in the article, the reviewer's distaste gathers steam: "Mr. Hammerstein has got his mediums mixed up. He wants to perform the function of the serious problem-drama (that is, to provide searching insight into the psycho-philosophical stresses of individuals and of society) with the light, but not too light touch. The theater provides two established methods for such delving: the serious drama and high comedy." Rodger's and Hammerstein had introduced this a form of musical back in 1927 with the groundbreaking *Show Boat*, which, like *The King and I* has a more fully developed plot and songs that advance the story along. *The King and I* also tackled a more serious topic, and reviewers had not yet developed a critical vocabulary for evaluating this new form of "musical" (as opposed to the "musical comedy") on its own terms. Nevertheless, the 1951 stage production with Gertrude Lawrence and Yul Brynner received Antoinette Perry (also called Tony) Awards for best musical of the year, and the play was the first musical to win the Theater Club Award.

By the time of the release of Twentieth Century-Fox's film of adaptation of *The King and I* with Brynner reprising his stage role and starring Deborah Kerr as Anna (her singing was dubbed by Marni Nixon), critics had accepted Rodgers and Hammerstein's new form, but some still rankled at the melodrama of the King's death at the end. A *Time* reviewer found that the film "moves along satisfactorily from spectacle to spectacle until the conclusion, when it's message (democracy is good; slavery is bad) gets a truly pedestrian delivery at Yul Brynner's deathbed." On the other hand, a critic for *Commonweal* called the film a "magnificent production" and actually praised the finale,

calling it "joyful and tearful." Former musical conductor turned critic Lehman Engel writing in 1967 also found the end fitting; he pointed out in his book *The American Musical Theater*, that in comparison to the original story by Leonowens and its adaptation by Margaret Landon in which the King does not die, Hammerstein's decision to have the King die is "a far more effective (and conclusive!) piece of dramaturgy." The film received nine Academy Award nominations and won five, including one for Yul Brynner's performance and one for the musical score. It also won two Golden Globe Awards for best film and best actress in a musical/comedy (for Deborah Kerr).

A spate of six new or revived musicals competed for New York theatregoers' attentions in 1996, among them a revival of *The King and I* starring Lou Diamond Phillips (best known for his portrayal of Ritchie Valens in the film *La Bamba*) as the King and Donna Murphy as Anna with direction by Christopher Renshaw. In spite of trepidation over whether anyone could erase the memory of Yul Brynner in the role that seemed custom designed for him, the revival enjoyed ecstatic reviews on its debut. As a *Newsday* reviewer noted, Lou Diamond Phillips "was the wild card when he dared to step into Yul Brynner's footsteps," and while a *People* reporter found that he fails to bring Brynner's "heft or authority to the role," a critic writing in *Time* agreed with the majority of critics who commended Phillips because he "eventually shrugs off the shroud of Yul Byrnner" to create a his own memorable version of the Siamese king. New York audiences, hoping for an evening of nostalgia, got even more than they could imagine from the $5.5 million-dollar production. The staging was so successful that it catapulted the musical into a new realm of legitimacy; *New York* magazine critic John Simon found himself comparing it to opera: "I never thought I would say this about a musical, but in a production such as this, *The King and I* is the equal of all but the supreme operatic masterpieces." Perhaps the musical has, indeed, come of age *Time* concluded that "Rodgers and Hammerstein songs are secular hymns liturgical music for the American mid-century."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Hamilton is an instructor at Gary Academy. Her essay examines the themes of subservience prevalent in the play.

Over the years, many reviewers of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *The King and I* have complained about the ending of the musical, in which the king dies. Critics have called his deathbed scene too solemn and melodramatic simply not in keeping with the musical comedy tone of the rest of the play. What these reviewers fail to recognize is that *The King and I* is not simply a "love" story between people of different cultures; the story is actually an analogy for a political relationship between their two countries. It is this political analogy underlying the relationship between Anna and the Oriental King that gives weight to the death scene (which Hammerstein added to the narrative when he adapted the story from Margaret Landon's *Anna and the King ofSiatri*). The deathbed scene resolves both of the central conflicts in the play both the one between Anna and the King and the larger national conflict. The King's death resolves the first issue by removing the potential of an interracial union; it resolves the second by removing the King's backward politics from Siam's foreign policy, allowing his more modern and anglicized son to rule the country with better diplomacy.

The conflict between Anna and the King resides in the hierarchy of their relationship who will rule, who will decide, and whose influence will predominate the lives of the King's children, and his subjects. The conflict between Great Britain and Siam is essentially the same. The presence of the British Ambassador in the plot attests to the economic and political context within which the schoolteacher and the King both operate. The British Ambassador may report the rumor that the King is a barbarian, precipitating the Queen's decision to make Siam a protectorate. Thus the political analogy of the variation of boy-meets-girl plot in *The King and I* is the ascension of unofficial British domination over Siam (later known as Thailand), a domination that will transform the economic, political, and ideological Siamese culture. By the same token, Anna's presence will transform the King's children, and ultimately his kingdom, in a similar manner. Great Britain's relationship with Siam was not destined to be an official political colonization such as the kind achieved in Malayasia, Burma, Africa, and Hong Kong; in Siam Great Britain pursued more of an unofficial alliance. Just as the courting between Anna and the King results in a kind of marriage (one that affords Anna some of the privileges of being a King's wife), Britain's courting of Siam ended not with an official colonization but with an agreement that gave Great Britain trade advantages with Siam.

The British actively sought trade advantages in Oriental nations, but this self-serving aspect of their interest was conveniently subsumed under the more commendable label of colonial development. It was in the interest of cultural development that Anna embarked on her program to educate and Westernize the royal children. To the British, the Siamese as well as Africans, Indians, and Arabs desperately needed exposure to Western religion, economic practices, and culture; and it just so happened that the British economy could use Siamese goods and services as well. Great Britain undertook

the monumental task of civilizing "Oriental" nations and, in the process, wove their economies into these countries.

To accomplish this act of cultural dominance required an attitude of superiority over Oriental peoples-in much the same manner that men were once thought to be superior to women. Social Darwinism was invoked to explain why the Asians (an other non-whites) had not advanced as far as Western nations, and the word "oriental" came to be associated with backwardness and moral corruption, thus justifying the British program of anglicizing Oriental people. The "Orientalism" of Asian countries consisted of the imposition of a negative stereotype (immoral, inferior, and backward) that filtered actual observations. It is a form of racism that persisted for many centuries and still has residual effect on modern Western/Asian relations. In her book *The English Governess at the Siamese Court: Being Recollections of Six Years in the Royal Palace at Bangkok*, the original Anna Leonowens tells of falling prey to cultural bias toward Orientals. She describes the Siamese people as "apt to be indolent, improvident, greedy, intemperate, servile, cruel, vain, inquisitive, superstitious, and cowardly. " Her terms coincide with the accepted sentiment that Orientals were morally inferior, child-like people whose culture would not progress without the intervention of their Western neighbors. As Edward Said commented on this relationship in *Orientalism*: "Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen though, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or... taken over." Sometimes the takeover was overt, as it was in India in the eighteenth century, when Great Britain replaced the fragmenting political structures in Bengal and elsewhere with its own governors. But in Siam, as well as in some other Asian countries, the defeat of the sovereign body was accomplished from within through education.

The King of Siam himself (the real King Mongkut as well as the Hammerstein character) played into the British imperialist hand and conveniently asked for Ms. Leonowens's teaching services. The King had already been brainwashed to value Western culture over his own. He viewed his world as substandard, in need of an infusion of Western culture that could be introduced through the education of his children. Unfortunately, he himself was unable to make the leap to the "scientific" and "modern" Western stereotype. He sings a song in which he expresses his doubts and insecurities; he finds leading his people "A Puzzlement," and the implication is that Anna can help him to sort out his confusion. Lady Thiang corroborates this view of the King, singing about his limitations and his many dreams that will never unfold, adding the faint praise that "at least he tries." His inability to suit the values of the new society he himself wants to impose upon his kingdom necessitates his death, to make room for young Prince Chulalongkorn to complete the transformation of Siam from a "backward" country to a modern one.

In the analogy between the human relationship and the political one, the courtship and ritual marriage (in which the King gives Anna a ring and demands that she place it on her finger) corresponds to the courtship and unofficial alliance between Great Britain and Siam. The King invites Anna to his palace, hoping to benefit from her teaching while controlling her as a "servant." On a political level, he invites Great Britain to create an economical presence in Bangkok, while hoping to prevent the British from taking over

the country. But the King cedes more than he plans to in both arenas. He refuses at first to give Anna the house she bargained for, but eventually he gives in and offers to build her one that adjoins the palace. Granting her the right to own property and build a proper English home is equivalent to offering her the right to colonize, and she jumps at the chance. On the political level, the King's first reaction to the threat of bemg made a protectorate is to send the British Ambassador packing, but Anna convinces him to put on a show of Westernization instead. Just as the show of "whistling a happy tune" ends up restoring confidence to Anna and her son, preparing for a display of Western culture has the ultimate effect of actually Westernizing the King's palace. In the process of sewing European dresses and learning to use European eating implements, the King's court is transformed into a quasi-European court, displaying many of the earmarks of British civilization. This is precisely where Great Britain wants Siarn eager to adopt to Western customs.

Giving Anna a home and adopting Western customs for an evening represents the King's hand in the colonizing of his culture. The Kralahome sees the imminence of assimilation more clearly than does the King, and he fears it. On two occasions he warns Anna not to "ruin" the King or the Prince with her Western ideas, but he soon he realizes his own impotence in resisting her. The Kralahome represents a throwback to old Siamese culture. His role in the new Siam is left undefined at the play's end. He has tried to arrest the inevitable union between the King and Anna and between Great Britain and Siam, but he has failed.

There are several moments in the play that reinforce the symbolism of a ritual marriage between the King and Anna. Her elaborate preparations for the entertainment of the British Ambassador place her in the role of "first lady" of the house ordering the King's wives about, deciding on decor, going into dinner on his arm, and engineering the conversation to display his scholarship. These are the tasks of the wife, and she reaps her rewards after the guests have departed in an intimate dance with *The King and I*n the gift of a ring. To further underscore her status, Lady Thiang on two occasions begs Anna to go to the King, at one point telling her that she herself cannot meet the King's "special needs," that only Anna can. Lady Thiang, the King's number one wife, also releases her son to Anna's teaching, recognizing that Anna can provide the young man with instruction that she cannot.

The King's death scene is unusual in that the focus rests not on the dying King but on Anna's decision to stay in Siam. The children certainly show more interest in thai outcome than in the death of their imperious father. Anna stands at center stage during most of this scene, with the King dying on a divan on one side and Prince Chulalongkorn addressing the wives and other children on the other. Besides Anna's decision, the other business to be accomplished here is the transfer of power from the King to the prince. This is duly accomplished and then the final conflict of the play is happily resolved- the Prince's second proclamation proves that Anna's teachings have taken hold, for he proclaims that no longer will his subjects have to bow in the lowly position of a toad but will stand erect and look him in the eye with confidence. He will be a King who values his subjects as people. The Prince has shown his mettle in Anna's classroom challenging her authority at times but also displaying an appreciation for

pragmatism and the demands that the modern world will make of him. At the time of his ascension to the throne, he is still a child still in need of a governess, and still malleable. Anna's decision to stay assures that the young prince will complete his Westernization and, more importantly, not forsake his humanity in a quest for power. In addition to fulfilling this political task, Anna's continued presence will also serve the personal relationship she had with the King; she will continue to be a loving, guiding force in the children's lives.

Source: Carole L. Hamilton, in an essay for *Drama for Students*. Gale 1997.

Critical Essay #2

In the following article, Erlanger examines the differences between the original Broadway production o/The King and I and the 1996 revival of the play, illustrating how the later production places more emphasis upon historical and cultural accuracy. Erlanger provides historical background for the play.

The new $5.5 Million Broadway revival of *The King and I*, the 1951 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical that Yul Brynner built a carrer on, lavishes enormous attention and money on constructing a sumptuous and remarkably authentic stage version of Thailand in the last century.

But the concentration on esthetic authenticity begs the question of whether the show, which opens on Thursday at the Neil Simon Theater and stars Donna Murphy and Lou Diamond Phillips, reflects a historical authenticity. The team of Australian designers involved has labored mightily to create the look of a Thailand that never existed.

The King and I, after all, is aromantic entertainment, much better known for its songs ("Shall We Dance" "I Whistle a Happy Tune," "Getting to Know You") than for its story. The musical, which starred Gertrude Lawrence and Yul Brynner, opened soon after World War II. Three years later, the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu would begin to pull the United States into what became the Vietnam quagmire. But at that time, Thailand was about as far from America, and about as exotic, as Oscar Hammerstein or anyone else could have imagined.

The original show (and the popular 1956 film version with Brynner and Deborah Kerr) employs a form of pan-Asianness that derives from a variety of sources: a generic restaurant in a shopping mall, say, with a bit of Japanese kabuki thrown in, along with white face to hide Western facial features and a peculiar, even eccentric vision of Buddhism.

The current version, based largely on a 1991 Australian production starring the English actress Hayley Mills, was first licensed by the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization and then embraced by it. This *King and I seems* to struggle hard to present a Thailand that a more sophisticated audience today would accept as truthful.

Indeed, the sets aim for the spectacular, with 2,000 square feet of gold leaf, majestic thrones and shimmering headdresses. The stage curtain six panels depicting traditional costumed dancers is flanked by the profiles of 30-foot elephants with gilt-edged trunks and jeweled eyes. Incense wafts from altars built over the box seats on either side of the stage, and before the curtain goes up, the audience can watch saffron-robed monks at prayer.

Brian Thomson, the set designer, has used the color deep burgundy to frame authentic Thai murals and designs taken from the Grand Palace in Bangkok, from old

photographs and paintings, and even from a richly lacquered, elephant-legged coffee table that he bought in northern Thailand.

The costume designer, Roger Kirk, also an Australian, has used Thai materials and clothing making sure that some of Anna's hoop-skirted dresses are of Thai silk and that the royal dancers (in numbers originally choreographed by Jerome Robbins, with added choreography by Lar Lubovitch) wear Thai sarongs and use Thai masks. Some of the "gold-bullion" embroidery and beadwork was done in India to keep down costs. "For Australians, Thailand is next door," Mr. Kirk said "So a cheap sarong won't wash." The glittering outfits that Mr. Phillips wears as the King are based on old photographs of the real monarch, as is the actor's haircut.

The striving for authenticity has also meant putting Asian faces in Asian roles. And even the accent of the actors as they speak English is as Thai-like as possible, with help from a dialect coach and a Thai waiter at a Bridgeport, Conn,, restaurant named, implausibly. *The King and I*. The waiter was found after an appeal on the Internet, said the show's director, Christopher Renshaw:

Dodger Productions, one of the producers, and Wendy's International, the hamburger chain, in its first association with Broadway production, are helping to market the musical as family entertamment. But Mr. Renshaw and his Australian team are more subversive than that.

They are modernizing this musical, and not only through the lavishness of the sets, the vast computerized lighting system designed by the other Australian on the team; Nigel Levings, and the sheer busyness of 54 actors: they are seeking to stress the deeper, even darker themes of colonialism, slavery, feminism and cultural ambiguity that they believe are buried in the text.

"To do it just as an entertainment, that's been done before," declared Mr. Renshaw, an Englishman who said that he reveres Thailand. Living there for a time, he added, made him question some of his Western assumptions about what it is to be civilized, and ultimately it changed him profoundly.

"If you're doing a piece that is 40 years old," he said, "you have to come in with a viewpoint. If you take all this new understanding on board, it shifts emphasis and changes the show, so it's worth doing."

The show itself, however, is viewed with displeasure even banned, in fact in the relatively easygoing, unpuritanical Thailand, largely because it treats one of the country's most enlightened monarchs, king Mongkut, as a vaguely silly barbarian who is introduced to "civilization" (and the polka) by a Western governess. For many Thais, *The King and I* diminishes both the terror of a truly omnipotent monarchy and the importance of the complex culture that produced it.

The musical tells the story of Anna Leono wens, a supposedly Welsh-born woman who was said to have served as a governess to the children of the King of Siam, as Thailand was known, in the 1860's.

The show's script, however, is based on a 1943 best-selling novel, *Anna and the King of Siam*, by Margaret Landon, which itself was loosely based on Anna Leonowens's two books. *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, (1870) and *The Romance of the Harem* (1873). Both are full of historical errors, beginning with the title of governess, since the King's diaries make clear that Anna was hired only as a teacher of English.

William Warren, a longtime American scholar of Thailand, said Anna's worst errors were in the second book, when her need to publish began to outrun her experiences. She asserts that the King threw wives who displeased him into dungeons and that he ordered the public torture and burning of a consort and the monk with whom she had fallen in love, an incident that Anna claims to have witnessed and which serves as the model for the Tuptim episode in the musical.

But Bangkok's Watery soil could support no dungeons or even basements, nor, Mr. Warren notes, is there mention of a public burning in domestic or foreign accounts of the time. As one of the king's biographers, Alexander Griswold wrote about Anna, "Virtue was not unknown in Siam before her arrival, and a cool assessment suggests that she did not loom very large in the life of King Mongkut or his children."

Anna's version of her own life was just that: a version. She was not born in Wales and brought up in a middle-class English family; she was born Ann Edwards and brought up in India. Her father was not a high-ranking British officer but a soldier who died before her birth. She grew up in an army barracks, where blankets served as walls to separate families and her mother found another man. Anna's own husband, Thomas Leon Owens, was a clerk in the army pay office at Poona. When he died, she was left with two children to support. She altered her name to the more exotic Leonowens and taught in the British community of Singapore before hearing of and landing a job as teacher to the many children (and many wives) of King Mongkut.

The musical, then, is a confection built on a novel built on a fabrication. It is an outpouring of American innocence, like so much of Rodgers and Hammerstein, suggesting that a pure American liberalism will lead, if not always to happy endings, then to a better civilization than the barbarity of the past.

American influence on Southeast Asia was apparent soon enough, and to their credit, Rodgers and Hammerstein, for all the conventional fantasies of *The King and I*, toy with some of the paradoxes. Even Anna starts to understand that her effect is helping to destroy the king she loves, let alone Tuptim, the Burmese slave she teaches. And as she tries to bring Western "enlightenment" to Siam, while protecting it from British colonialism, she begins to sense the strain and damage she has caused.

"We blunder into cultures other than our own and we do such terrible damage," Mr. Renshaw said of Anna. But did she ever feel that way? "I don't think she ever felt it," he said slowly. "But it's in the text; there's more in it than they wrote." Similarly, he said, King Mongkut seems to understand in the script that he must modernize Siam if it is to survive and escape colonialism, * 'but he knows that change will be tainted and destroy him."

The oddest part of the musical is the bizarre ballet' "The Small House of Uncle Thomas," enacted for the King and his British guests. It is the story of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, narrated by the slave Tuptim, which Anna suggests to show the British how civilized Siam really is. Under Anna's influence and teaching, Tuptim turns it into a parable about her own subjugation and that of the King's other women.

In America, at roughly the same historical moment, there was a civil war about slavery of a far harsher kind than the servitude then practiced in Thailand. Rodgers and Hammerstein seem, at least, to be warning their audiences not to be too smug in their attitudes toward this "barbarian" king.

Theodore S. Chapin, president of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, which licenses 2,500 R&H productions annually, said, "In any given year, every producer in Australia asks us about *The King and I*." But Richard Rodger's daughter, Mary Rodgers Guettel, was especially taken with this Australian production and its sets and thought it would do well on Broadway.

Five years later, with more money and two actors who are under contract for a year, Mr. Renshaw and his team believe they can pull off their real vision of the play.

"We've given them lots of leeway," Mr. Chapin said, from using lines about Abraham Lincoln in early rehearsal scripts to lots of "soundscape" music, much of it Thai to carry the action and make the show more like a film. "You can add music," Mr. Chapin recalled telling Mr. Renshaw, "but remember.there's a polka in this score.'"

He paused, and added with a hint of irony: "I don't think they've pulled it too far toward authenticity to keep it from being an American musical."

Before King Mongkut becomes too romanticized through revisionism, however, it should be noted that he did speak a remarkably embellished and florid English and had added to the Grand Palace a clock tower modeled after Big Ben in London. According to Mr. Warren, the King also provided his favorite artists with scenic photographs sent to him by President Franklin Pierce. The result was some startling glimpses of Mount Vernon and Monticello in traditional murals on the walls of one temple, Wat Bovorn-nives.

And it was King Chulalongkorn, Mongkut's son (whom Anna most influences in the show), who traveled widely and built the Throne Hall, a strange Italianate structure that still stands in the Grand Palace complex, with its Thai-style roofs instead of the planned domes.

"I would hope," said Mr. Thompson, the set designer, "that in this production the story comes across that it isn't the Thais who are the strangers but Anna herself; that Anna, being a woman of that period needing to wear those garments and needing to have those beliefs, is the real stranger in that court."

Source: Steven Erlanger, "A Confection Built on a Novel Built on a Fabrication," in the *New York Times*, April 7, 1996, pp. 4,23.

Critical Essay #3

In the following review, which originally appeared in the New York Times on March 30,1951, Atkinson argues that while The King and I is a less innovative, accomplished musical than Rodgers and Hammerstein's Oklahoma! or South Pacific, it "is an original and beautiful excursion into the rich splendors of the Far East, done with impeccable taste by two artists and brought to life with a warm, romantic score, idiomatic lyrics and some exquisite dancing."

As drama critic for the New York Times from 1925 to 1960, Atkinson was one of the most influential reviewers in America.

Nearly two years having elapsed since they invaded the South Pacific, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II have moved over to the Gulf of Siam. *The King and I*, which opened at the St. James last evening, is their musical rendering of Margaret Landon's *Anna and the King of Siam*. As a matter of record, it must be reported that *The King and I* is no match for *South Pacific*, which is an inspired musical drama. But there is plenty of room for memorable music-making in the more familiar categories. Strictly on its own terms, *The King and I* is an original and beautiful excursion into the rich splendors of the Far East, done with impeccable taste by two artists and brought to life with a warm, romantic score, idiomatic lyrics and some exquisite dancing.

As the English governess who comes out from England in the Eighteen-Sixties to teach the King's children, Gertrude Lawrence looks particularly ravishing Jn some gorgeous costumes and acts an imposing part with spirit and an edge of mischief. Yul Brynner plays the King with a kind of fierce austerity, drawn between pride of office and eagerness to learn about the truth of the modern world from a "scientific foreigner." Apart from the pleasures of the musical theater, there is a theme m *The King and I*, and, as usual, Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstem have developed it with tenderness as well as relish, and with respect for the human beings involved.

Part of the delight of their fable derives from the wealth of beauty in the Siamese setting; and here Jo Mielziner, the Broadway magnifico, has drawn on the riches of the East; and Irene Sharaff has designed some of her most wonderful costumes. As a spectacle, *The King and I* is a distinguished work. In the direction, John van Druten has made something fine and touching in the elaborate scene that introduces the King's charming children to their English school marm. Jerome Robbins, serving as choreographer, has put together a stunning ballet that seasons the liquid formalism of Eastern dancing with some American humor. Yuriko, the ballerina, is superb as the Siamese notion of Eliza in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Mr. Rodgers is in one of his most affable moods. For Miss Lawrence he has written several pleasant and ingratiating numbers which she sings brightly "Hello, Young Lovers!" "The Royal Bangkok Academy" and "Shall I Tell You What I Think of You?" Dorothy Sarnoff does something wonderful with "Something Wonderful," which is one of Mr. Rodgers' most exultant numbers. Probably the most glorious number is "I Have

Dreamed," which Doretta Morrow and Larry Douglas sing as a fervent duet. Mr. Brynner is no great shakes as a singer, but he makes his way safely through a couple of meditative songs written with an agreeable suggestion of Eastern music.

Say a word of thanks to Russell Bennett for his colorful orchestrations that make a fresh use of individual instruments and that always sound not only interesting but civilized. His orchestration should be especially appreciated in the long and enchanting scene that brings on the children one by one.

Don't expect another *South Pacific* nor an *Oklahoma*! This time Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein are not breaking any fresh trails. But they are accomplished artists of song and words in the theatre; and King and I is a beautiful and lovable musical play.

Source: Brooks Atkinson, in a review of *The King and I* (1951) in *On Stage- Selected Theater Reviews from The New York Times*, 1920-1970, edited by Bernard Beckerman and Howard Siegman, Arno Press, 1973, pp. 333-34

Adaptations

A 1946 black and white film starring Rex Harrison and Irene Dunne and produced by John Cromwell was adapted from Margaret Landon's novel *Anna and the King of Siam* before Hammerstem undertook the musical version of the work.

Charles Brackett produced the famous film version with Yul Brynner and Deborah Kerr (1956); it is available on videotape from CBS/Fox Video.

A sound recording featuring Julie Andrews, Ben Kingsley, and Marilyn Home is available on Philips records (1992). A 1989 disc includes selections from various Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals sung by Samuel Ramey (available from EMI). Decca carries the sound track of the original Broadway cast with Gertrude Lawrence, while RCA carries one made in 1977 with Yul Brynner and Constance Towers (who took over the role of Anna in the original Broadway production after Gertrude Lawrence died of cancer). Capital Records carries the 1956 motion picture sound track recording as well as a disc of musical excerpts from the film.

Topics for Further Study

Is Anna a feminist? What are the principles of feminism that she upholds, and how does she demonstrate her interest m the rights of women? Where and how does she depart from your idea of feminism?

How is "orientalism" portrayed in *The King and I*? What role do you think "orientalism"' played in the British Commonwealth's interest in Siam in the nineteenth century? What role does this play indicate that it had?

What effect on the meaning of the story would occur in adapting *The King and I* to a dramatic play with no music or songs?

How would the story of *The King and I* be different if Anna were happily married when she took the assignment to act as governess to the King's children? Is this play a love story?

Compare and Contrast

Nineteenth-century: In Anna Leonowens's day, women were expected to show respect for men by not challenging their authority. They were to be demure and beautiful, not strong and self-willed. Few career opportunities existed for women who had no husbands to provide for them.

1950s: World War n necessitated women joining the work force to replace the men who were fighting overseas. By the 1950s, women had a secure place in the work force, although their career options were usually limited to clerical functions.

Today: Women can choose from almost unlimited career possibilities and are no longer expected to appear subservient to men.

Nineteenth-century: Europeans looked down on "Orientals" as backward, morally inferior people who could only benefit from an encounter with Western culture, an encounter that would place the Asian countries in a socially and economically dependent position.

1950s: World War H interrupted the establishment of trade practices between Asian and European/American countries. The American internment of Japanese-American citizens during the war years proved that the specter of Orientalism still persisted.

Today: Trade with Asian countries is more equitable and fair; however, vestiges of racism against Asians persists in many places and is still slow to disappear.

What Do I Read Next?

The real Anna Leonowens wrote two books about her adventures in Siam teaching the children of King Mongkut. Her books, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court (1870) and The Romance of the Harem (1873)*, were renounced by Mongkut's biographer, who claimed that her accounts grossly misrepresented the Siamese king as a tyrant and that her description of the court was inaccurate.

Margaret Landon wrote a popular novel based on Leonowens's books, *called Anna and the King of Siam* (1944). It was also the basis for a 1946 film, starring Rex Harrison and Irene Dunne, before Hammerstein adapted it to the stage play.

Maxine Hong Kingston's novels *China Men and The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girl among Ghosts* discuss the situation of contemporary Chinese Americans m California.

Farewell to Manzanar by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston portrays the experience of Japanese-American citizens in internment during World Warll.

Further Study

Engel, Lehman *The American Musical Theater*, Macraillan, 1975.

A narrative history of musical theater m America that describes the form and conventions of various forms of musicals' musical comedy, operetta, reviews (revues), and others.

Ewen, David. *New Complete Book of American Musical Theater* Holt, Rmehart, and Winston, 1970

A useful compendium of musical plots and brief biographies of composers, lyricists, and producers

Fordin, Hugh. *Getting to Know Him*- A Biography of Oscar *Hammerstein II*, Random House, 1996

An in-depth biography of the life and works of Oscar Hammerstein

Jackson, Arthur. *The Best Musicals*. From Show Boat to A Chorus Line *Broadway, Off-Broadway, London*, Crown Publishers, 1977.

A coffee-table book of photographs and text chronicling the history of musicals from 1866 to 1977

Landon, Margaret *Anna and the King of Siam*, The John Day Company, 1943,1944

A faithful prose rendition of Anna Leonowen's book about her exploits as governess in Siam

James, Lawrence *TheRise and Fall of the British Empire*, St. Martin's Press, 1996.

An objective and scholarly look at the causes and consequences of the extensive empire England built and then had to disband Marshall, P. J. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

This illustrated text adopts a neutral position regarding the impact of the British Empire on its colonies and on its own national development.

Mast, Gerald *Can't Help Stngm': The American Musical on Stage and Screen*, Overlook Press, 1987.

An m-depth review of the most popular musicals in America, with photographs.

McConache, Bruce "The 'Oriental' Musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstem and the U S War in South East Asia" m *Theater Journal*, Volume 3, October, 1994, pp 385-98

Compares narrative patterns of musicals with patterns of foreign policy Asserts that three Rodgers and Hammerstem musicals helped draw the United States into the Vietnam War

Said, Edward *Orientalism*, Penguin, 1995.

Using Egypt and the Arab nations as examples, Said asserts that "orientalism" is a form of identifying the "other" in stereotypical terms as a means of bolstering the national identity of European countries and of justifying their domination of the Asian countries.

Time, Volume 57, number 78, April 9,1951)

A positive theater review of the stage debut of *The King and I*.

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Review of *The King and I in Newsday*, April 25,1996

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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