Gender Meets Race: Andy Tennant's *Anna and the King* (1999) and Walter Lang's *The King and I* (1956)

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Abstract:
Both Tennant's Anna and the King and Lang's The King and I stage the prohibition of physical contact between the 'white woman' and the 'yellow king'; they employ stark oppositions and attempt to contain hybridity. Nevertheless, the clear-cut binarisms are imploded in both films. This is partly due to the films' thwarting of cultural inscriptions of race and gender [...]. Ironically, the 1999 version - and this is my thesis - turns out to be more racist than the original version from 1956 as Tennant's remake adheres to imperialist ideas even more intransigently than Lang's film.

1 Gender has to be regarded as a social determinant, where cultural and historical differences meet. Therefore, gender cannot be studied in isolation, but has to be considered in its interrelation to other cultural determinants. Thus, I would argue, Tennant's *Anna and the King* connects gender performances with race performances, just as the "original" *The King and I*, on which the more recent film is based. In the following, the process of the cultural production of both race and gender, as highlighted in the transfer from "original" to remake, will be analysed. Both Tennant's *Anna and the King* and Lang's *The King and I* stage the prohibition of physical contact between the "white woman" and the "yellow king"; they employ stark oppositions and attempt to contain hybridity. Nevertheless, these clear-cut binarisms are imploded in both films. This is partly due to the films' thwarting of cultural inscriptions of race and gender - the Occident, culturally encoded as masculine, is embodied by a woman, whereas the feminine Orient is represented by a man (whose masculinity, however, is compromised which presents him as exotic object of the gaze in The King and I and feminised by the camera).

2 In the following I will read *Anna and The King*, focusing on gender and race. And I will attempt to explain the gap between enthusiastic American and disapproving Thai reception as it was discussed on web forums. Furthermore, I will deal with the more recent film's failure to achieve political correctness despite of its intention to "re-write" the original a politically correct way. Ironically, the 1999 version - and this is my thesis - turns out to be more racist than the original version from 1956 since Tennant's remake adheres to imperialistic ideas even more intransigently than Lang's film.

The King and I

3 *The King and I* can be read as both a day dream and a narcissistic female fantasy of grandiosity, in which Prince Charming not only appears (à la *Pretty Woman*) but also disappears at the right moment, enabling the heroine to slip into the king's robe. Lang's musical film not only narrates a love story, but also a tale of female self-empowerment. Nevertheless, the spectator is left in doubt whether it is Ms. Leonowens or an allegorical Britain who is awarded the unofficial Siamese sceptre at the end of the film. The film suggests that the king a. k. a. Yul Brynner dies due to his heart-breaking love of the British woman Anna. This "liquidation" solves the problem of a romance that cannot lead to marriage, as this would mean Anna's integration into the king's harem - a fate as unbearable for the heroine as for the movie's American audience of the 1950s. Moreover, Ms. Leonowens is married already, albeit to a dead man. Her former husband, whom she still loves, died in the service of the British Empire. Thus according to Lang's film, true romance is authenticated rather than ended by death. Ms. Leonowens will not desecrate the unique love for her husband by marrying again, not even a king. Therefore, the spectator cannot hope to witness a consummation of love between the Asian king and the British teacher.

4 The new Siamese sovereign holds his inaugural speech at the deathbed of his predecessor; a speech that could derive from a school paper written for one of Ms. Leonowens' lessons: he declares rituals of devotion as well as court ceremonies as outdated and harmful to both body and mind and abolishes prostration before the sovereign. In contrast to his father, who proved unable to impart the enlightenment taught by Ms. Leonowens to his subjects and adhered to slavery and polygamy, we can expect the young king, Anna's model pupil, to liberate the slaves and organise his love life according to the Western model, that is, as a search for the one woman who can be his soul's companion, lover, wife, and mother all at the same time.

5 *Mores Britannici vincent omnia*: Siam does not have to become part of the British protectorate, as the coloniser Anna with her crinoline (which extends wide enough for a whole class of schoolchildren to hide under it) is already so successful that Siam's appropriation is rendered unnecessary. Even Ms. Leonowens's name signals her imperialism: it consists of the noun *leo*, the imperial lion and the British heraldic animal, and the verb *to own*, alluding to the appropriation and possession of foreign territory.[1] Leonowens acts as a widow worthy of

[1]Although Leonowens carries the imperial lion in her name, she is "merely" a woman. The imperial lion of Britain has already lost its mane and the Empire is in decline. From this perspective, the renunciation of Siam's occupation can be understood differently: the effeminate Great Britain is no longer capable to make Siam, which has degenerated to a doll's house, its protectorate.

her husband, who, as colonel of the British Army, had fought to spread the blessings of British culture all over Asia. Fulfilling the various tasks as a teacher and as an English-speaking correspondent, and, moreover, as the Siamese king's Minister of Foreign Affairs, his widow is even more successful in dedicating herself to this cultural transfer than her deceased husband. The court dignitaries as well as the women from the king's harem address Anna as "Sir." At Anna's request, the king's main wife explains the honorary address "Sir" as resulting from Anna's "scientific appearance" ("[Y]ou scientific. Not lowly, like woman.") lifting her above other women. The simple gender inversion of the address stages the well-known Western cultural pattern (outlined by Edward Said among others), constructing the West as "masculine," as rational, effective, and civilised, and the East as 'feminine," as passive, irrational, mysterious, and intoxicating.[2] It should be noted that "Asia," "Orient," and "Siam" are constructed differently in various Western and European traditions. The mentioned pattern thus functions as the "cliché of a cliché." Siam not only signifies irrationality, but also "Eastern wisdom," if not in *The King and I*, then at least in *Anna and the King*. The Western gaze (which would have to be specified as European, Western European, U.S.-American, etc.) locates such Eastern wisdom in Buddhist, Confucian, or Taoist Asia rather than in Islamic, Hindu, Shintoist, or Shaman Asia. However, the pattern of a masculine and active Europe/Britain and a feminine, devout Asia dominates *The King and I* as well as *Anna and the King*. Both films do not specify and differentiate Asia, but simply have recourse to the above-mentioned pattern.[3] By means of the gender-inverted form of address, this pattern is exposed as a system of cultural ascription, as the representative of masculinity, occidental culture, and rationality obviously is a woman.[4] One could argue that colonial discourse thereby reveals that which it disavows. The interlocking of the West, represented as Woman, and the East, represented as Man and king, foregrounds the contingencies and contradictions within the Western systems of cultural ascription.[5]

6 The consistent address of Leonowens as "Sir," which Lang's film offers, disfigures the figurative Western self-description as masculine by taking it literally. The gender identity of

[2]The juxtaposition of "passive" Asia and "active" Europe goes back to Aristotle, who associated this binarism with the opposition *European nations = low intelligence* vs. *Asian nations=/ high intelligence* (see Aristotle 251).

[3] If I use the term "Asia" in a general, unspecified way, I am quoting Western discourse on Asia as it is used in the film.

[4]The continual address of Anna as "Sir" appears as a parody of Althusser's concept of subject constitution: it is the interpellation of the Other which contours and determines the interpellated subject (see Althusser).

[5]The mechanisms of differentiation and exclusion within Western systems of representation define culture's Other not only as the foreign (Asia, Africa, colonies), but (Western) Woman is conceptualised as the Other and the foreign as well. She is familiar but still *un-heimlich*, the uncanny dark continent in the heart of civilisation and European culture. Christa Rohde-Dachser has demonstrated to which extent Woman is stigmatised as the "dark continent" and as "Africa/Asia within Europe" in Western systems of representation.

every British man and every British woman is fixed: he, or rather she, is a man. In contrast, the East - from the Occident's point of view - is not only a woman, but also a child; as a woman the East always already has infantile traits which have to be countered by education and civilising efforts. Thus it does not come as a surprise that Anna not only teaches the heir to the throne, as originally agreed upon, but the whole court: the harem, dozens of princes and princesses, and even the king himself become Anna's pupils and submit to Anna's cunning educational plan. Asia apparently has to be schooled by England.

The Spectacle of Exoticism

7 In both films Asia is furnished with the well-known properties of exoticism: Siamese men and women are wrapped in ornate garments decorated with gold, both sexes wear trousers as well as long skirts and expensive golden jewellery. Occasionally, the men are presented as uncivilised "wild men," stripped to the waist.[6] More often, however, they - and especially the monarch played by Yul Brynner - wear jackets opening at every move, thus allowing the spectators to catch a glimpse of their well-formed chests. Hence, the Siamese are clearly eroticised as they are representing the "exotic," the "other," the "pre-civilised," categories always already connoting femininity from a Western perspective.

8 The introductory scene of Lang's film emphasises this connotation. Anna and her son have just arrived at the harbour. Through his binoculars Louis observes the arriving barque with the prime minister and his entourage. This contrast between the binoculars (and their phallic connotations) and the barque (connoting femininity, as ships often do), repeats the opposition of male West and female East. The binoculars serve as a device for exploring the strange country and its visitors; they make little Louis a "Peeping Tom" - who has to come to terms with the nakedness of the observed people. Astonished and shocked, he tells his mother that the prime minister is "naked." The Victorian mother can tone down this scandalous discovery only slightly by being more precise. She corrects her son calling upon the cliché of the half-naked wild man, when she tells him that the prime minister is only "half-naked," . The use of the gaze in *The King and I* once again thematises the scenario mentioned above: the Western, instrumental, technical, "male" gaze which is directed towards a picturesque, "wild," eroticised, "female" object. Thus little Louis re-enacts a "phallic" constellation of the gaze which traditionally assigns to the men the position of owning and controlling the gaze,

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whereas women are allocated the complementary position of consciously exhibiting themselves to the gaze. Thus, neither the position of the object nor of the subject of the gaze is gender indifferent - as John Berger and Laura Mulvey among others, have shown. The observers posit themselves as (male) subjects, whereas the observed are (female) objects of the phallic gaze - even if this gaze belongs to a small boy or a Victorian widow who in any case will cause gender trouble among her Siamese hosts. The Siam that is visually investigated by Louis's and Anna's gazes (as well as by those of the cinematic spectators fascinated by this glimpse into the Oriental world) appears to enact its status as object of the gaze in a rather confrontational manner. The rotagonists wear costumes with "show-effect". Yul Brynner, in particular, enacts his role as the King of Siam as a veritable spectacle of masculinity, impersonating the virile bald man and the defiant child at the same time.

9 In contrast to Anna and the King, which offers colourful, exotic pictures of Siamese architecture and a breath-taking landscape etc. (excerpts of the film could in fact serve as advertisement trailers for the Thai tourism industry), the Siam of The King and I appears almost empty. Images of Siamese exoticism will not be found, unless they are created in the minds of the audience, who, in view of the screen's emptiness, might devise their own projections and imaginations.

Fairy Tale and Musical: A Suffragette in Siam

10 The story that requires such "projective activity" on the audience's part has many characteristics of a fairy tale. An unglamorous teacher is loved by a king and given a ring - but, in spite of this "engagement ring" she will not be married to him, but instead turns into an admired and adored secret ruler herself. The king is immensely rich, the teacher is incredibly old (at least she is bold enough to maintain that she is 150 years old). Despite of the fairy tale character of the Siamese set-up, it allows Anna to encounter rather homely problems far from home. Demanding a "room of her own," she acts as an early British suffragette.[7] Anna is able to fulfil the roles of the king's understanding friend, caring mother, and object of desire successfully because she treats the foreign king exactly in the same way in which she has learned to treat British men: she suggests ideas to him but then makes him believe that these

.[7] Even today the presentation of the naked *masculine* body is a taboo within Hollywood productions. Until the 1980s, every film that displayed male genitals was X-rated and thus made commercially insignificant. The display of female as well as "exotic" male bodies (or male bodies in exotic surroundings) has always been less tabooed: as early as the 1930s, Buster Crabbe as Tarzan was shown nearly naked in *Tarzan - the Fearless* like Johnny Weissmueller later on. In 1973, *Shaft in Africa* displayed a naked black male body without arousing a scandal. In the case of Yul Brynner's naked upper body this "exoticism-exception" applies, too. Only five years earlier, Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire* had been harshly attacked by censors because he was shown wearing an undershirt.

"good ideas" are his own. She caters to his narcissism, flatters him and makes him appear in a favourable light in the presence of others, but nonetheless strictly sees to her own interests. Thus, Lang's portrayal can be seen as a re-figuration, in which the supposedly strange, essentially "other" (i.e. the Asian man) merely copies the British man. The strategy employed seems obvious: otherness is negated; the alien is turned into a mirror image of the well-known. The royal palace of Siam, which at first sight appears exciting and strange, turns out to be a Victorian living room in exotic disguise. The secret domestic battles between the pater familias and the wife as a secret ruler, are re-enacted cheerfully between the fantasy king and the Victorian teacher. Moreover, beneath the Victorian veneer, American family values (not only of the 1950s) appear (like that of the wifely "better half" ruling with friendly determination and exerting a mild civilising pressure upon the man in danger of regressing to barbarism, in his daily strife of professional life (even if he no longer has to colonise the Wild West). In contrast to the average American woman of the 1950s (and in contrast to the average Victorian British woman), Anna is not forced to be a housewife; the financial insecurity of her widowed status enforces her professional career. As a teacher at the Siamese royal court she succeeds in obtaining a "room of her own" (which has been a central feminist demand ever since Virginia Woolf's groundbreaking essay) in a place that is geographically and culturally far removed from home. The musical film guarantees Anna's independence by means of the king's eventual death; thus it not only circumvents the threatening implications of an "impossible" union, but also maintains Anna's (in some ways comfortable) status as a widow. Moreover, she can continue to dedicate herself to the realisation of her concepts: science and "modernisation." "Being scientific" becomes the focus of Lang's film; a focus encompassing everything that is desirable and instructive.

11 Nevertheless, the belief in science which *The King and I* celebrates and promotes is made to appear in a comic light. It remains unclear whether Lang's film mildly criticises the "science craze" of the USA of the nineteenth-century (as well as the 1950s) in a self-reflexive manner or whether the film's criticism is aimed at the "barbaric" king Mongkut whose devoted attempts to serve the gods of colonisation are ridiculed as science mania. However, even if one assumes that Lang's musical derides the king's naïve dealing with Western science, science itself still is contaminated by the royal mimicry of the Western belief in "being scientific." The film thus casts a distorted gaze onto what is possibly the central element of colonial self-confidence.

12 Advocating tolerance and castigating chauvinism are integral aims of the teacher's programme for modernisation. Thus Anna Leonowens orders a map of the world as

replacement of the traditional map of Siam, which presents the country in bright red and in huge dimensions, whereas the map of the world by contrast reduces Siam to a small point. As Siamese students experience this presentation of their country as humiliating, the teacher assumes that she can relieve these negative feelings by demonstrating that England is even smaller than Siam. Ms. Leonowens, who opposes her students' supposed or factual nationalism so vehemently, at the same time propagates British morals, British manners, and a British way of life throughout the film as exemplary in every respect. Thus, her chauvinism is by no means less distinct, but only slightly better concealed than that of the little Siamese princes and princesses, who enthusiastically greet the fact that Siam is larger and more powerful than the neighbouring country, Burma. Just as the Siamese royal palace is a screen onto which the "gender trouble" of the Victorian living room is projected, Siamese nationalism is a screen that functions as a cover for British chauvinism and colonialism. Lang's film preaches British tolerance and its exemplary status, but it practices (I am referring to Paul de Man's binary) something different: in fact, it may be read as a guide on "how to successfully colonise an Asian country without military aid." These military means are nevertheless present in the film as a background threat. Thus the banquet in honour of the British ambassador serves the purpose of informing Queen Victoria about Siam's progress towards civilisation and of preventing her from declaring Siam a British protectorate.

13 The prevention of Siam's military occupation by Britain does not turn *The King and I* into a "politically correct" film. Yet, despite its stereotypes, *The King and I* seems better than its reputation. As the film is designed as musical (see Altman; Feuer; Taylor), even as fairy tale - it is free from the demands of mimesis. To expect an exact historical portrayal would contradict the genre; the musical is - in Richard Dyer's words - a "gospel of happiness." It is not intended as a realistic narrative but as a spectacle - a spectacle of masculinity. The musical being "the only genre in which the male body has been unashamedly put on display in mainstream cinema in any consistent way" (Neale 18).[1] The musical exhibits the half-naked male bodies of Siam, and it tells a fairy tale that foregrounds its own structures. *The King and I* uses well-known stereotypes of the exotic, barbaric Orient but the genre prohibits any equation of the musical film's Orient with "real" Asia. Moreover - and this adds to the vindication of Lang's *The King and I* - the pattern of Cinderella who meets Prince Charming, which is the pattern not only of the musical but also of the fairy tale, is intricately inverted: Yul Brynner does not actually represent the Prince Charming whom Anna and the film's female spectators might dream of. Although love is the topic of a few conversations within the film, it seems as if dead men are more appealing than those living: Ms. Leonowens praises

her dead husband, but at the same time appears to enjoy a widowhood that enables her to live in sovereign independence.

Anna and the King

14 Tennant's *Anna and the King*, the 1999 remake of Lang's 1956 musical film manages to do without the death of the Siamese king: Mongkut is allowed to survive. Moreover, at the end of the film Ms. Leonowens returns to England. Europe withdraws and Asia is left to its own devices. These changes are due to Tennant's efforts to create a politically correct version of the story. In spite of his efforts of ideological decolonisation, *Anna and the King* was censored in Thailand; the authorities did not evaluate the production as politically and ideologically unproblematic. So why did the producers, the director, and the scriptwriter fail in their attempt to de-imperialise the 1956 "original"? In which respects is the remake different from *The King and I*? *Anna and the King* narrates almost the same story as the original film: Anna Leonowens, the widow of a British colonel, accepts the offer to teach at the court of Siam; she travels to Siam - wearing a crinoline that is less voluminous than the one in *The King and I* - in order to teach the heir to the throne, but soon she is surrounded by a crowd of potential pupils - the dozens of children that King Mongkut has with his various wives. Like her predecessor, Anna in the 1999 version falls in love with the Siamese monarch , again a banquet takes place and again Tuptim, one of Mongkut's wives, is desolate because she is in love with another man. Yet, while in *The King and I* Tuptim's beloved drowns in a river, in *Anna and the King* the lovers Tuptim and Balat are both publicly executed. While the musical film does not aim at a detailed depiction of the socio-political context of Siam in the 1860s, Tennant's version intends to narrate not only the private tale of the king's and the teacher's developing friendship, but also a political story: it depicts a general's attempt to overthrow the king and kill all the heirs to the throne. General Alak refuses any co-operation with imperialist states of the kind Mongkut practices; his revolt aims at maintaining Siam's sovereignty. The revolt fails; Mongkut succeeds in deceiving his enemy while Anna and her son Louis succeed in simulating the British Army's advance. Anna has Louis play the British forces' signal of attack on his dead father's trumpet and has fake fireworks ignited. The revolutionaries are deceived and flee. Thus Siam is saved through masquerade and mimicry practised by the colonial and imperialist "assistants" of Mongkut. By means of cunning warfare and intrigue a small British boy and his mother are able to outwit well-trained Asian military personnel. This is how deficient the racial other, the Siamese, are conceptualised: outwitting Asians is child's play.

15 In contrast to *The King and* I, Anna in Tennant's film does not remain in Siam but returns to England. As science does not seem to offer a solution to the "impossible" romance, she has to go expressing her grief on her last evening with the Siamese king:

> Anna: I would just like to know why, if science can explain the mystery of something as beautiful as music, it is unable to posit a solution for a king and a schoolteacher. King Mongkut: The manner in which people might understand such new possibilities is, I'm afraid, a process of evolution.

16 King Mongkut accepts her decision ("Home. This is good, Mem. Very good for Louis as well."), despite the pain it causes him: "Until now, Madam Leonowens, I did not understand the supposition man could be satisfied with only one woman." Mongkut and Anna dance with each other for the last time, closely watched by crown prince Chulalongkorn. Later, in voice-over the adult Chulalongkorn reasons:

> I was only a boy, but the image of my father holding the woman he loved for the last time has remained with me throughout the years. It is always surprising how small a part of life is taken up by meaningful moments. Most of them are over before they start, although they cast a light on the future and make the person who originated them unforgettable. Anna had shined such a light on Siam.

This echoes the film's opening on Chulalongkorn's voice-over:

> She was the first Englishwoman I had ever met. And it seemed to me she knew more about the world than anyone. But it was a world Siam was afraid would consume them. The monsoon winds had whispered her arrival like a coming storm. Some welcomed the rain, but others feared a raging flood. Still she came, unaware of the suspicion that preceded her. But it wasn't until years later that I began to appreciate how brave she was and how alone she must have felt. An Englishwoman. The first I'd ever met.

17 The "framing" technique reveals the circular structure of the film, the beginning and the ending of the film suggesting memory as a structuring device. Chulalongkorn, now King of Siam, recalls his childhood, the situation at court, and the British teacher's stay. This reconstruction of the past through memories, moreover, is rarely thematised throughout the film's traditional "authorial" narration, but only hinted at in those shots which reveal the young crown prince as an observer while we as spectators sometimes watch him watching.

18 The film thus operates on a structural adaptation of the "primal scene": the king's son watches his father and his motherly teacher - the woman his father loves - when they meet, following their disagreements as well as their waltzes. This construction of the gaze of the crown prince secretly watching his "parents" from a gallery eroticises the scene observed, similarly as to the phallic gaze constituting the introductory sequences of *The King and I*. By means of the choreography of the gaze, the waltz turns into an analogon to the sexual act.

19 In contrast to the couple of the 1956 version, Yul Brynner and Deborah Kerr, Yun Fat and Jodie Foster do not dance a polka but a waltz. Thus the spectator is presented with a dance in three-quarter rhythm that had come into existence in late eighteenth century Austria and that - at least according to the "mythology" of the waltz - became popular as a "bourgeois" dance against strong resistance that the Austrian court mustered against it after the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Anna and the king thus engage in a traditionally "anti-courtly" dance, the dancers whirling around in a tight embrace. By their spinning movement the distinct outlines of the world seem to dissolve, "isolating" the dancing couple dedicated only to the moment from its "shadowy" environment. Moreover, the waltz not only traditionally has "anti-court" and "pro-bourgeois" connotations, but sets into motion (gender-) positions as the dancers circle around each other in a blissful daze. By the end of the film, at the very latest, the polygamous harem owner King Mongkut is converted to monogamy: he finally comes to believe in the unique romantic love (a concept which apart from the concept of "being scientific" talked about and applauded in Anna and the King, seems to be Britain's main export). However, Mongkut is not allowed to enact what he now deems right - the love towards one woman, who is a British citizen. According to the script, the king is prohibited this consummation of this love by Siamese tradition which he has to respect even if he personally suffers from it, as the king has to rule over a harem and is not allowed to relate only to one woman. The unequal couple is not granted the fulfilment of their love. Thus the number of instances of physical contact between them is severely limited - the king once puts his hand on Anna's back when they dance and once touches her cheek; not even the usual film kiss is permitted in this mixed-race relationship.

The Prohibition of Physical Contact and the Containment of Hybridity: White Woman and Yellow King

20 Tennant's film not only narrates the difficult relationship between coloniser and colonised, between England and Asia, and the prohibition of physical contact between white women and yellow men in the nineteenth century, but *Anna and the King* itself appears to phantasmagorically refer to the prohibition of such physical contact violating all the rules of a Hollywood love story. Of course, the Hollywood love story, especially the melodrama, often stages such prohibitions of bodily contact, for example with regard to class (socially "impossible" relationships), race (mixed-race relationships), and gender (homosexuality). Melodrama, however, as a rule, shows how the lovers do overcome all obstacles and "do touch" - and subsequently have to pay the price of social sanctions for their transgression.

Anna and the King does not even allow the king and the teacher to really get together. Although the film propagates a meeting of cultures (i.e. the reorganisation of Asia according to Western concepts of modernisation), physical contact between the British-Siamese lovers is declared impossible. The teacher and her king are obliged to live chastely according to both Christian virtues and Buddhist wisdom ("Life is suffering"). *Anna and the King* upholds the prohibition of physical contact, although, on closer examination of the protagonists, the British woman appears less "British" and the Asian man less "Asian." At the beginning of the film, the audience learns from Louis that British Anna only lived in England as a little girl and has spent far more time in Asia than in the country of her birth. Her son Louis has never been to England at all. When Louis alerts his mother to her precarious relationship to England, she responds firmly that the "other place" where she used to live was also British: "India is British." When Anna states this, her Indian servants primarily are responsible for upkeeping a British household and upholding British manners and a British lifestyle, glance at each other meaningfully. King Mongkut's attitude towards Siam is as complex as Anna's Britishness and her relationship to England are precarious. As the king, he represents and embodies his country. Yet at the same time he has a critical, "Western", "enlightened" attitude towards Siamese traditions such as slavery. He speaks English and teaches the language to his favourite daughter. He is enthusiastic about occidental science and interested in Western technical devices; he even wears glasses. The glasses reflect the hybridisations within *Anna and the King*. They are presented as a marker of imported Western culture - however, glasses were not invented in Europe but in Asia.[8]

21 Thus Occident and Orient, embodied by the teacher and the king respectively, do not clash without being mediated. To the British woman, the Orient has become a second - or rather her true - home, while the Siamese king, enthusiastic about modernisation, is guided by Western ideas. Thus the European woman is less European than she herself assumes, whereas the Asian man adheres to European ideas and ideals. Closer examination reveals that the ostensibly stark contrast between the protagonists is less profound than it appears at first sight. Both the teacher and the king live in in-between spaces; their biographies are characterised by hybridity and dubious doublings: the English woman has not been to England for decades, while the "barbaric king" could be awarded a prize for his humanitarian efforts. Considering these overlappings between Orient and Occident, the "apartheid" to which the script subjects both protagonists appears inappropriate; in fact it seems to be applied as an antidote to the obvious hybridisations. As in *The King and I*, in *Anna and the King* the king and the teacher

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are prohibited from becoming content lovers. Yet they do not have to suffer a fate as terrible as that of the film's other couple of lovers, Balat and Tuptim.

The Failure of Privation or Crime and Punishment

22 The story of the lovers Tuptim and Balat is presented as a tragic subplot in Tennant's film; in contrast to the couple from the main plot they are guilty of transgression. Tuptim is given to the king by her family against her will; she arrives at the palace at the same time as Anna. Although the king and the other women of the harem treat Tuptim well, she is desolate as she loves Balat (and not the king). Balat believes that he can endure life without Tuptim only by dedicating himself to Buddha. Tuptim cannot bear their separation; she shaves her head and disguises herself as a monk in order to be able to be close to her lover. However, she is found out and put to trial together with Balat; both are sentenced to death. The execution scene in which Tuptim and Balat are beheaded simultaneously is partly shot in slow motion. The camera does not show heads fall, but in a highly aestheticised way focuses on drizzles of blood soiling the white flower Tuptim holds in her hand.

23 Parallel shots centre on King Mongkut praying and desperate Anna in her house. The teacher, shocked by the unjust court trial involving torture, had publicly declared in the courtroom that she was going to ask the king for his intervention. The king who claimed that he had indeed intended to interfere, however, told her that her public announcement had rendered this impossible, as it would generate the impression of him as his teacher's puppet (implicitly the Mongkut of the remake thus argues that he does not want to act as puppet - as his predecessor in *The King and I*). Thus the king holds Anna Leonowens responsible for an act of extreme barbarity; it remains questionable whether the film, which aims at highlighting the king's goodness and generosity, actually challenges the positive characterisation of the king. If this were not the case (and this is what seems to happen), the film would serve as just another take on the conceptualisation of Woman (even a woman coming from the West and thus connoting masculinity) as a Pandora's box. Barbarism - always already connotated as feminine as the antithesis of the civilised, the spiritual, and the cultural - could thus be traced back to a woman. The system of cultural ascriptions conceptualising the West as rational, civilised, and masculine along the lines of which *Anna and the King* operates - would thus implode: the central antagonism between a masculine West and a feminine East would be challenged by notions of "masculinity as civilisation" and "femininity as barbarism." The discomfort that a Thai audience experiences about a woman interfering in the king's governmental affairs would then be negotiated in the film itself, which could be interpreted as

an inverted *Iphigenia on Tauris*, presenting a woman who does not prevent and abolish but, on the contrary, instigate and promote barbarity. Barbarism would be marked as constitutively female.

24 The love affair between Tuptim and Balat and the resulting trial turn out to be a crucial test for Anna and the king's relationship. Anna packs her things in order to leave Siam and its cruel king but is moved to stay by the pleas of the prime minister who informs her about the desperate political situation of an impending revolt. The Balat and Tuptim episode, however, not only provides a crucial test for the relationship between the teacher and the king, it also functions as a double that is capable of distracting from their romance disaster. Those who transgress moral standards and legal rules have to die tragically (even if they move our hearts). The bloody death of the subplot's couple can be read as device to make the decision of the "main couple" plausible - to respect the given limits, to enjoy only a few moments of waltzing bliss and to part at the end of the film in spite of all love. The Tuptim and Balat subplot is organised as exactly the kind of love melodrama which the main plot about Anna and the king does not provide, as it is not characterised by the female masochistic disposition constitutive of melodrama and "Women's Film" (see Gledhill). Anna has to suffer from the adversities of life, but is, nevertheless, able to make decisions and appears to be the active, responsible and knowing subject of her own biography. Moreover, *Anna and the King* does not employ the pattern typical of "Women's Film" and melodrama according to which the heroine, already punished and socially ostracised for her love, has to be destroyed by fate. Although the film suggests that it is not easy for the heroine to face the challenges of life in Siam (shown in her repeated violations knowing and unknowing of the social order of the host country), her violations of the conventions are accepted rather than punished severely. Rather than following the genre of love melodrama, the relationship between Anna and Mongkut seems closer to conventions of screwball comedy. The teacher and the king engage in verbal duels: the "clashes of civilisations" and the "lovers' war" are delivered in the style of the 1930s as alternative and as genre shift away from that of the Tuptim and Balat-melodrama.

25 The voice-over framing the film once again emphasises Anna's goodness and her exemplary conduct as well as the deep love between Anna and the king. Even though all of this is also part of the film's action, as the voice-over that shows that *Anna and the King* is reconstructed from memory is revealed as the voice of the adult Chulalongkorn, who, in the meantime, has become king, it is suggested that the Western perspective (clearly linked to the autobiographical writings of Anna Leonowens on which the film is based) is validated by the highest authority of Siam, that is, by "Asia." Possibly, the Thai critics were not so much taken

aback by the fact that Hollywood once more casts its Western-colonial gaze upon Asia but rather by the film's narrative configuration, which makes the "East" validate Anna Leonowens's perspective.[9] In spite of the scriptwriters' thorough attempts to portray Siam in a fair and politically correct way, these detailed descriptions are undermined by a narrative pattern about the Western enlightenment of Asian darkness (embodied in a schoolteacher) and legitimated by a Thai voice-over. It should be noted, however, that the Thai disapproval of the film is at the same time accompanied by misogyny: the anti-imperialist impetus is complemented by a misogynist one.[10] The Thai students expressing their rage against the Hollywood production in web forums mostly disagreed with the film's suggestion of their mighty and exemplary king Mongkut having accepted advice from a woman of whatever nationality.[11] Significantly, however, the misogyny apparent in the Thai reception does transgress national borders. Although the (mostly adolescent) Thai and U.S.-American web forum visitors evaluated *Anna and the King* in widely different ways, there seems to exist a transcultural agreement concerning one particular question: young American men also criticised that Tennant's film promoted a woman as king's consultant.

26 Although *Anna and the King* depicts the clashing of differing cultures (the British visitor keeps misunderstanding Siamese culture; i.e. for example, categorising Siamese politeness as indiscretion), the film emphasises the constancy and universality of human "essentials". The king is a good man - this we learn, at the very latest, when he mourns his young daughter's death, and the impression is reinforced when he finally converts to monogamous romantic love (which he cannot live only because he lives in a "backward" polygamous country). Thus, at the end of the film, Anna has imparted her most important convictions and principles to Siam: that slavery has to be abolished, that prostration violates the dignity of man, and that "real" love is monogamous rather than polygamous. In fact, this third Western "export idea" appears to be the central one: monogamous romantic love becomes the ideological essence of the Hollywood film. At the beginning of the film, Anna is given a house of her own outside the palace. This is very important to her because she wanted

[9] The film displays critical attitudes towards imperialism as well; thus the crown prince complains about his "imperialist teacher," and General Alak's revolt is an attempt to prevent the imperialist West from influencing Siam. However, both the crown prince and Alak are discredited, as Anna is the best of all teachers, Alak is excessively cruel, and the revolt fails. Thus criticism of imperialism is not only thematised, but also refuted within the film.

[10] Within the film, Thai misogyny is mentioned as well: the crown prince has a fight with Louis because the latter has apologised to his mother. According to the crown prince, a man should never apologise to a woman in Thailand.

[11] This discomfort about being reigned by a woman does not mean that Siam has never been ruled by a woman. As early as the seventh century AD, Chama Davis, a woman, was the factual regent over the kingdom of Haripunchai.

to live in her own small palace according to the British proverb "My home is my castle." The final voice-over by the new king Chulalongkorn stresses the film's message: Anna has enlightened Siamese gloom, she has explored the "dark continent" and opened it up to Western ideas. Although she is a woman, she has brought science, enlightenment, and "masculine" rationality to the "female" Orient. Her colonising efforts have been immensely successful; she has carried out military attacks - or rather, their simulations - brilliantly. Although the Western system of cultural ascriptions that classifies Europe as masculine and Asia as feminine is irritated considerably by the gender inversions of *Anna and the King*, Tennant's film holds on to the general axiom that the East has to be civilised (albeit by a woman, who is actually called "Sir" anyway) even more intransigently than Lang's 1956 version. Thus *Anna and the King* succeeds even less in renouncing an imperialist attitude than its predecessor, *The King and I*. Although Tennant's film occasionally shows a cheerful disregard of gender conventions, it does not do so consistently. In the episode on Tuptim and Balat's trial, Anna is held responsible for the escalation of cruelty and barbarity. In this episode, the pattern West-masculine and East-feminine is disturbed by an appeal to those cultural patterns that specify Woman as always already anti-cultural. Such an association of femininity and barbarism does not take place in Lang's film. Throughout *The King and I* "barbarism" appears to be put in inverted commas; it is comically transposed and does not seem dangerous at all. In contrast, slavery and the judicial system in *Anna and the King*'s Siam are shockingly cruel - Western intervention, so the film's logic, is desperately needed.

27 In both film adaptations of Leonowens's biography discussed here the intricate nexus of gender and race offers significant insights: the Western woman, representing the Other within the Western cultural system of representation, advances to a representative of the Same as she is confronted with the non-European Other. She comes to embody Western masculine rationality and effectiveness. *The King and I* as well as *Anna and the King* employ traditional Western cultural ascriptions and stereotypes. However, they also demonstrate that clear demarcations remain impossible. Both films expose their protagonists as hybrid, displaced, "split" subjects living in-between cultures. However, the renunciation plots of both *Anna and the King* and *The King and I* aim at containing hybridity: the West (the Westernness of which is diminished by being represented as a woman) and the East (which is Westernised by its male embodiment) are not meant to come together. White woman and yellow king are denied the consummation of their love in both films.

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