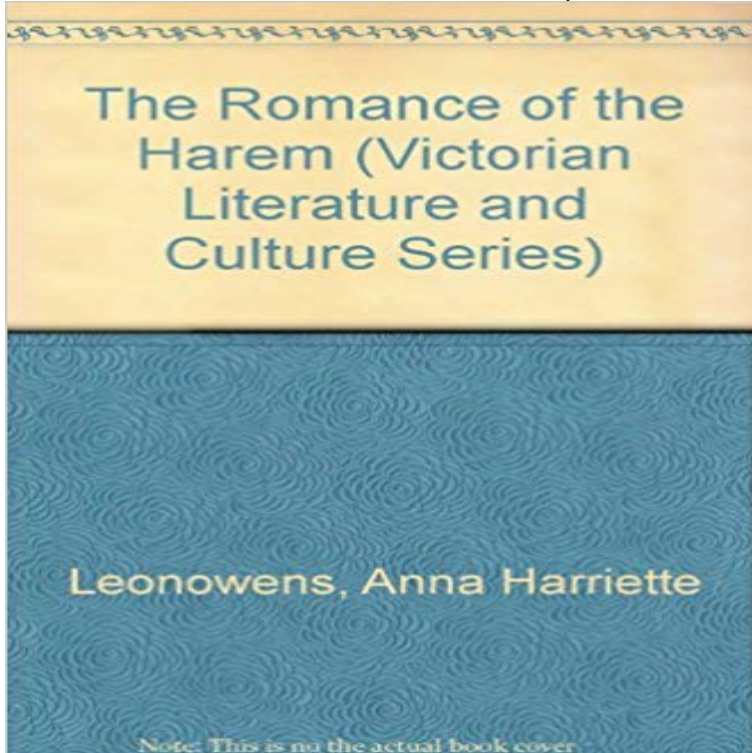


The Romance of the Harem (Victorian Literature and Culture Series)



From setting foot in Asia in 1849 (or was it 1845?) as Anna Crawford (or was it Anna Edwards?) to waltzing with Yul Brynner in glorious technicolor, Anna Leonowens and her romanticized experiences as the only Westerner behind the walls of Nang Harm (the walled harem of the king of Siam) have had a long, colourful, and often controversial existence. Reproduced here is the original 1873 edition of *The Romance of the Harem* by Anna Leonowens (long out of print) which was the source for a 20th century book *Anna and the King of Siam* known to us all through Rogers and Hammersteins *The King and I*. Why, asks Susan Morgan in her provocative introduction, should we read this obscure travel account, with its dubious and often inaccurate or uncheckable facts and its author of shady repute? For several reasons: first, the narrative speaks in its unique way to three of the most incendiary issues in 19th century England and America - imperialism, slavery and womens rights. Further, *Romance* is the only inside story ever written by a Westerner of life behind harem walls in 19th-century Thailand. Every morning for more than 5 years, Anna Leonowens took her young son by the hand and walked into an isolated community of 9000 women and children. And finally, when accepted as fictionalized history, Anna Leonowens dramatic stories about some of the women in that harem take a prominent place on the growing shelf of rediscovered 19th century womens travel narratives. This book is an addition to womens studies programs, Asian studies, literature and history courses. It should also fascinate general readers with a taste for exotic cultures and settings.

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