

RICHARD HEAD (c. 1637-1686?), WRITER AND BOOKSELLER. Author of the spectacularly successful, semi-autobiographical novel and travel narrative *The English Rogue* (1665), Richard Head came from a respectable middle-class family. Perhaps briefly educated at Oxford, Head became a bookseller and writer, and his works early gained a reputation for obscenity and licentiousness. *The English Rogue* caused a sensation for its explicit sexual material, which led Head to revise it to avoid prosecution. Immensely popular, *The English Rogue* quickly expanded into a multi-volume work: in 1668 Francis Kirkman wrote and published part II, and Kirkman and Head together parts III and IV (1671), although Head later denied his part in the work's continuation. A fragmentary Part V appeared as part of an abridgement of the four part work in 1688, but neither Head nor Kirkman was the author. *The English Rogue* (Part I) relates the adventures of a certain Meriton Latroon, thief and adventurer, and it is purportedly Latroon's autobiography. As C.W.R.D. Moseley and Jonathan Pritchard have both noted, this work draws heavily upon a variety of genres, such as the jest-book, the cony-catching pamphlet, the criminal biography and autobiography (the rogue pamphlet), and the dictionary of underworld slang (the canting dictionary). As significant is Head's reliance on John de Mandeville's fantastical fourteenth-century travel narrative, *Mandeville's Travels* (c. 1356); Pritchard calls this use, in fact, an example of Head's "unblushing plagiary." The last third of the work details Latroon's travels to the Mediterranean and finally to India, where he escapes enslavement by being shipwrecked on this country's shores; he reforms there and marries, concluding Part I. The chapter below details Latroon's experiences in Siam, and it places sodomy in a context familiar from many early modern European travel narratives.

#### EDITIONS AND SOURCES:

*The English Rogue: described in the life of Meriton Latroon, a witty extravagant; being a complete history of the most eminent cheats of both sexes.* London: Taylor and Francis, 2002.

Moseley, C.W.R.D. "The English Rogue: A Modern Mandeville?" *Yearbook of English Studies* 1 (1971): 102-107.

Pritchard, Jonathan. "Head, Richard (c. 1637-1686?)" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Online.

From THE ENGLISH ROGUE (1668)<sup>1</sup>

#### CHAPTER 71: FROM ZEYLOON, HE ARRIVED AT SIAM; AND WHAT THERE HE SAW AND OBSERVED<sup>2</sup>

Siam is a kingdom contiguous to Pegu,<sup>3</sup> a part of the East-Indies. And as the people are included within the burning zone, therefore far from being fair, yet [they] are tall of stature, very strong and valiant, and generally so straight that few are found among them crooked. Formerly,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This selection is from the 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (1668), pp. 99-100.

<sup>2</sup> *Zeyloon* according to Thomas Herbert's 1634 account of his travels into Africa and Asia, Zeyloon is close to the "point of India called Cape Comrein" (pp. 189-90); roughly equivalent to modern-day Sri Lanka (previously, Ceylon). *Siam* modern-day Thailand.

<sup>3</sup> *Pegu* a city or district in southern Burma (now, Myanmar).

<sup>4</sup> *Formerly* in early times.

they were much given to sodomy, to prevent which, 'twas wisely ordered<sup>5</sup> (though strangely) that the males as soon as born should have a bell of gold (and in it a dried adder's tongue) put through the prepuce<sup>6</sup> and flesh. When then desire of copulation stimulates any of them, he presents himself to some expert midwives, who advise him to drink opium or some such somniferous<sup>7</sup> potion; which having done in their presence, he falls asleep. During which interval, they remove the ball, and apply to the orifice from whence it was taken an unguent, which affords a speedy cure. Then is he free to make use of such as his fancy<sup>8</sup> leads him to. The young girls are served in a worse manner, and it is as great a rarity to find a pure virgin here at ten years old, as to find a maid at sixteen in most places of France or its neighbouring countries. And that these young fry<sup>9</sup> may be capable of that employment they are destinated unto, they have potions given them to drink. The women here, still the more to allure the men from that detestable and unnatural act of sodomy, go naked, as little a novelty in these parts as for Irish and Scotch to wash their clothes with their feet, their coats, smock and all tucked up about their middles, though twenty men stand by as deriding spectators. I say, they go naked to their middles, where the better sort are covered with a fine transparent taffeta or dainty lawn, which by a cunning device is so made to open that as they pass along the least air discovers all to all men's immodest views. Their priests, which they call *tallapoi*,<sup>10</sup> are seeming[ly] very zealously superstitious. They somewhat incline to Mahometanism,<sup>11</sup> for they pretend they will not drink wine, being forbidden it by their law. Yet [they] are abominable hypocrites, for though they wear a sheep-skin with the wool thereon, not suffering any hair to be on their bodies, and in show lead a chaste life, yet I found the contrary as you shall understand by what passed between one of them and myself.

[...] being on shore with our ship's crew, I chanced to walk abroad, carrying with me a bottle of Spanish-wine: As I entered into a wood, intending not to adventure too far, there came to me one of these *tallapoi* or priests, in the habit aforesaid, with a horn about his neck, resembling a sowgelder's<sup>12</sup> but much less, with which (I was told) they, with the sound thereof, used to convene the people to hear them preach. This holy infidel, espying me, blest himself (as I guessed by his gesture), and approaching near me, I imagined that he prayed for me by the elevation of his eyes and hands. As a requital,<sup>13</sup> I proffered him some of my wine, and having tasted thereof, [he] liked it so well that by signs I understood he desired his hornfull of me. To tell you the truth, I liked it so well myself that I had no desire to part with one drop more of it, but his importunities so far prevailed that I granted his request; which having obtained, he made no more ado but drank it off,<sup>14</sup> making but one gulp thereof, a thing contrary to the strictness of his profession. After this, he seemed to bless me, and so departed.

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<sup>5</sup> *ordered* arranged, ordained.

<sup>6</sup> *prepuce* foreskin.

<sup>7</sup> *somniferous* soporific.

<sup>8</sup> *fancy* desire.

<sup>9</sup> *fry* young insignificant persons.

<sup>10</sup> *tallapoi* i.e., talapoin, Buddhist monk or priest.

<sup>11</sup> *Mahometanism* Islam.

<sup>12</sup> *sowgelder* A professional spayer of sows (female pigs), a sow-gelder wore a horn around his necks, on which he blew to announce his arrival.

<sup>13</sup> *requital* polite return.

<sup>14</sup> *drank it off* quickly consumed the entire quantity.

It was but a little while before he again presented himself to my view, and beckoning to me, I followed him. [I] [c]oming close up to him, he pointed with his finger to a place, where covertly I espied three maidens (as I supposed), to whom he by signs persuaded me to go. [I] [s]itting down amongst them, they entertained me with as much civility as they were endued withal, and courted me after their amorous fashion. One of these was the handsomest that I have seen in those parts, though not to be compared for form of face with the homeliest kitchen-stuff-wench<sup>15</sup> in London. I dallied with her so long, till that lust conquered my fancy; [I] attempting something, and being in a fair way to it, this satyr-goat-devil (I can't invent a name bad enough to call him by) presently falls down upon us, and taking me thus unawares, lying on my belly, I was not able to help myself, that he had like to have performed his business and questionless had effected it, but that the two maidens standing by (no ways ashamed at this most shameful sight) assisted me, pulling him off. I presently started up and seized him, and tripping up his heels, I laid him on his back. Having so done, I bound him. Then, taking out my knife, I could not find in my heart to spare him one inch; and that he might not have any witnesses left of what was done, I took away his testicles too. The three young girls fled, fearing my rage and revenge might have extended to them; and fearing myself that they would give information of what I had done, I fled too to my ships-comrades; and giving them account of what had happened, we all judged it the safest way to go aboard; and so we did, with all expedition possible.

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<sup>15</sup> *kitchen-stuff-wench* a term of contempt: 'kitchen-stuff' refers to the refuse or waste products of a kitchen, while 'wench' is a girl of the rustic or working-class.