



Notorious Muse: The Actress in British Art and Culture, 1776-1812

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In this interdisciplinary volume of essays, historians of art, literature, dress and theatre examine the impact of the actress on British art and culture of the Georgian era. the profession, female performers are shown to have played a vital and hitherto under-appreciated role in the artist's studio, forging fruitful collaborations with the leading artists of their day and becoming nearly as influential in the studio as they were on the stage. Acting as models, muses and patrons, the actress inspired a remarkable proliferation of images in which issues of theatricality, sexuality, and social mobility were explored in a manner impossible in depictions of more respectable women. theatrical profession to Sarah Siddons, Tragic Muse. Jonathan Bate explores the personal, professional and pictorial factors that entrenched Siddons's identification with Shakespearean tragedy and Dorothy Jordan's with comedy. Several essays, by Gill Perry, Aileen Ribeiro, Frederick Burwick and Shearer West, analyse the presentation and reception of the actress's body: its role as a living and as a painted work of art; the relationship between femininity and professional status; the strategic deployment of dress on- and off-stage; and the function of theatrical gesture in performance and on canvas. Heather MacPherson traces the subversive use of caricature to desecrate the revered idols of the stage, and Joseph Roach the emergence of the cult of celebrity. actress was in transition at this period. The growing professionalism of the female performer, along with her greater social mobility, financial sufficiency and creative autonomy, began to supplant - though not entirely erase - her time-honoured reputation as a sexual object.

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