



The Cult of Kean

Jeffrey Kahan

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A Shakespearean actor who made his career on the public stage, whose sex life was known and discussed in Britain, America and France, Edmund Kean has inspired numerous writings, many biographies among them. But until now, no work has tackled the complicated and fascinating story of his literary appropriation, both in his own day and after his death. Dealing with the way a variety of canonical authors - including Byron, Coleridge, Keats, Dumas, Twain and Sartre - appropriated Kean through the centuries, "The Cult of Kean" traces a remarkable literary legacy. In each chapter, Jeffrey Kahan discusses how many of history's greatest figures viewed Kean, and how these figures examined and discussed themselves in relation to-or projected themselves onto - a variety of constructions of the great actor. Kahan first explores the rise of Kean in light of rising democratic sympathies, then in light of Kean's equally autocratic dealings with playwrights, among them John Keats. He looks at Kean's sexual shenanigans at Drury Lane, exploring them in the wider social context of infidelity; and explores perceptions of Kean in America, during his 1820-1 and 1825-6 tours. "The Cult of Kean" cites many letters from Kean's mother and still others from his wife, none of which have been published previously. The study also features rare and interesting paintings of Kean, as well as depictions of how writers, actors and film makers continue to add to his remarkable literary legacy.

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