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James Boaden

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The Life of Mrs Jordan

The actress Dorothy Jordan (1761–1816), contemporary of Sarah Siddons, was born in London, one of nine children. Her reputation as the greatest comic actress of her time was secured upon joining Sheridan's company at Drury Lane in 1785. Remembered particularly for cross-dressing roles such as Rosalind in *As You Like It* and Viola in *Twelfth Night*, she brought great charm and spontaneity to her interpretations. Her life off-stage was equally colourful, and she was for over twenty years the lover of William, Duke of Clarence (later King William IV), with whom she had ten children. This two-volume biography, first published in 1831, was written by her friend James Boaden (1762–1839), a playwright who later turned to theatrical biography. In it, he relates the extraordinary and poignant story of her life from acclaim to obscurity. Volume 1 covers events up to 1798, including her establishment at Drury Lane and her liaison with Clarence.

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VOLUME 1

JAMES BOADEN



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THE
L I F E
OF
M R S. J O R D A N;
INCLUDING
ORIGINAL PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE,
AND NUMEROUS ANECDOTES OF
HER CONTEMPORARIES.

BY JAMES BOADEN, ESQ.
AUTHOR OF THE LIFE OF KEMBLE, &c.

“Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee
JEST and youthful JOLLITY;
SPORT, that wrinkled Care derides,
And LAUGHTER holding both his sides.”

L'ALLEGRO.

SECOND EDITION.
IN TWO VOLUMES.
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P R E F A C E.

PREFACES are seldom honoured with much attention. They are commonly passed over until curiosity is completely gratified by the contents of the work. But a few lines, in which an author must speak of himself, may, at a moment of leisure, attract the reader's notice; and certainly should never detain it long. I have merely to lay before him the reasons that induced me to compose the work now published.

From the death of Mrs. Jordan up to the year 1824, inclusive, a sort of sullen and interrupted annoyance occasionally recalled the public mind to the disappointment as to Mrs Jordan's CIRCUMSTANCES; and the injury sustained by her CREDITORS, and some members of her FAMILY. Having had the pleasure of Mrs. Jordan's personal acquaintance for some years, and having paid unwearied attention to her professional exertions from their very

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commencement in London, it was not, perhaps, too extravagant a thought, that I might construct a narrative, not without attraction of two kinds:—that should exhibit a more perfect picture of her than had been given while she occupied the STAGE, and a truer representation of her PRIVATE life, than other writers had yet been enabled to supply.

As to the stage on which she acted, I had long been conversant with its history—the inquiries essential to my Life of Mr. Kemble, had extended beyond himself; and the results were either present to my mind, or were of easy reference, in the great mass of theatrical documents around me. As to her last moments, Sir Jonah Barrington, in a work published in 1827, had given such intelligence as he obtained upon the spot; and spoken with reserve on some other points of her history, hardly less interesting. Certain private friends, for whom I entertain entire respect, here offered to my use a very interesting portion of Mrs. JORDAN'S CORRESPONDENCE; throwing a steady light upon the most MOMENTOUS INCIDENTS in her private life. As they were emi-

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nently calculated to settle, by their AUTHORITY, every thing that had been questioned, and shewed her candour and affection equal at least to the warmest wishes of her friends, I accepted them with pride and pleasure. Permitted to use the very documents themselves, I have printed them exactly from the ORIGINALS in her own hand-writing; they are un-studied compositions, but they all sprung warm from the heart, and, like her acting, speak its true and impassioned language.

Her ACTING, indeed, was heart in action; and its pulsations vibrated to the extremities of its theatrical habitation. The fault of the great bulk of her imitators, or contemporaries, was, that they never seemed under the actual influence of a passion, but to play from the recollection of it. They described the sensations: the vice of French Tragedy. But this is not the place for disquisition—I therefore refer the reader to my work for every satisfaction of this sort; and conclude with a hope, that what I have executed with great zeal and unwearied application, may be fortunate enough to

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*amuse his leisure, and place Mrs. JORDAN herself,
and PERSONS connected with her in life, in the
true relative positions, either as to the present age
or posterity.*

J. B.

60, *Warren Street, Fitzroy Square,*
November, 1830.

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