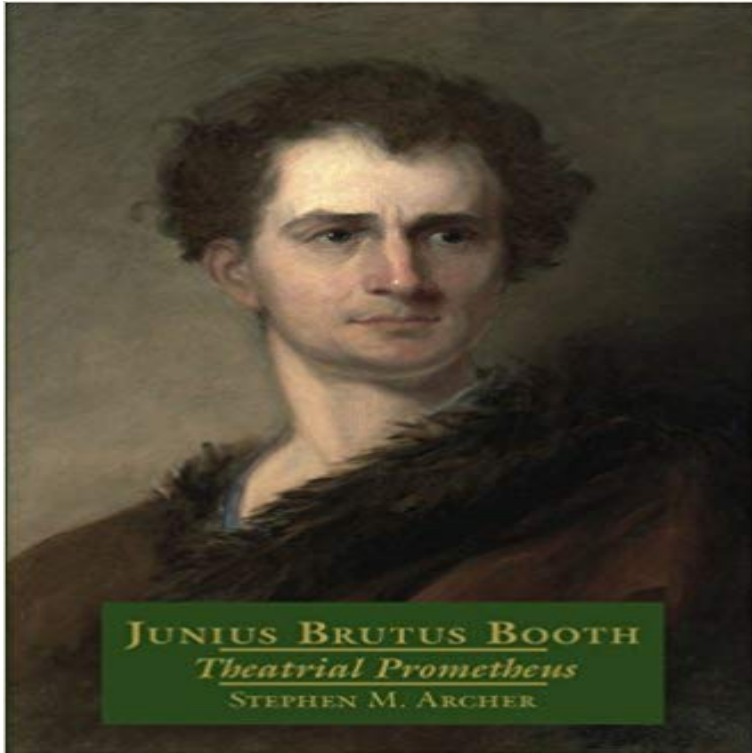


Junius Brutus Booth: Theatrical Prometheus



In this, the first thoroughly researched scholarly biography of Junius Brutus Booth, Stephen M. Archer reveals Booth to have been an actor of considerable range and a man of sensitivity and intellect. Archer provides a clear account of the actors professional and personal life and places him in relationship to his contemporaries, particularly Edmund Kean and William Charles Macready. Indeed, he begins the book on February 20, 1817, as Booth first confronts Kean on the Drury Lane stage. Archer then provides a chronological account of Booths life, summarizing and assessing his career by drawing upon the opinions of his fellow actors as well as of the critics and scholars of the day. From 1817 to 1852 Booth toured throughout North America, enjoying a reputation as the most distinguished Shakespearean tragedian on the American continent. Still, he yearned for success on the British stage, a goal he never attained. His public image as a drunken, dangerous lunatic obscured a private life filled with the richness of a close and loyal family and an appreciation for living. The worldwide fame assured for the Booth family by John Wilkes Booths bone-shattering leap from the Presidents box had eluded Junius Brutus Booth throughout his lifelong exile in America. But from that event until today, no American family of actorsnot the Barrymores, the Drews, the Jeffersons, not even the Fondashas stimulated such scrutiny as the Booths. After Junius Brutus Booths death, the actors wife, in an attempt to preserve family dignity and privacy, burned the bulk of his letters and papers. In spite of this, Archer has done a remarkable job of reconstructing Booths life and career. Eight years of research, pursuing Booth from Amsterdam to San Francisco, has resulted in an accurate, fascinating narrative that both records and illuminates the actors life with objectivity and perception. Archer follows Junius Brutus

Booth in unprecedented detail as the actor deserts his wife and child to come to America with a pregnant Covent Garden flower girl. His American adventure lasted thirty-five years and ended with his death on a steamboat on the Mississippi River after having played his final engagement in New Orleans. Archer concludes by tracing the lives and fortunes of Booths immediate family. He also provides a complete performance record, including every known performance of Booths, indicating date, place, theatre, whether or not it was a benefit, and the terms under which the actor appeared. This riveting and absorbing work will interest scholars of American theatrical history, the history of Shakespeare on stage, and American cultural history.

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