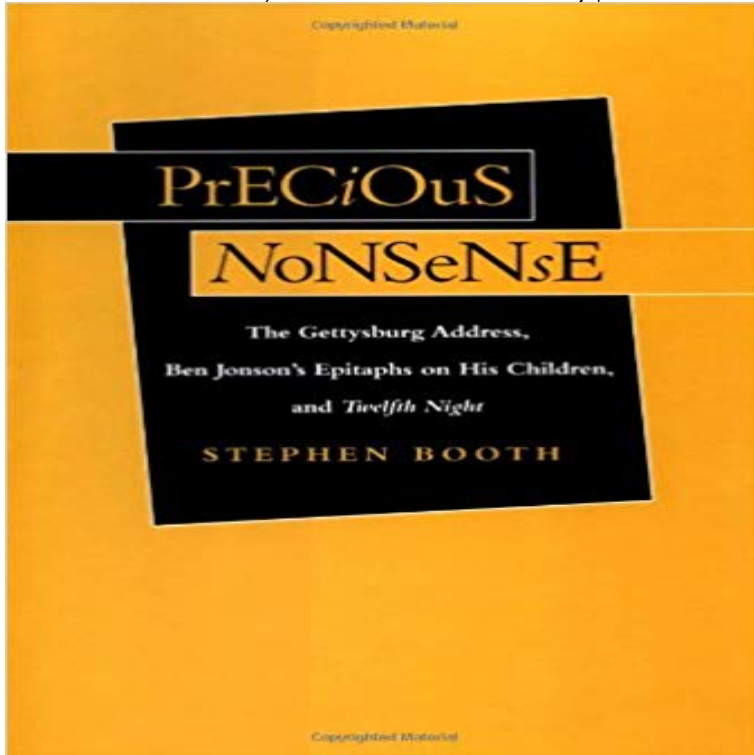


Precious Nonsense: The Gettysburg Address, Ben Jonsons Epitaphs on His Children, and Twelfth Night



Why do we value literature so? Many would say for the experience it brings us. But what is it about that experience that makes us treasure certain writings above others? Stephen Booth suggests that the greatest appeal of our most valued works may be that they are, in one way or another, nonsensical. He uses three disparate texts—the Gettysburg Address, Ben Jonson's epitaphs on his children, and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to demonstrate how poetics triumphs over logic in the invigorating mental activity that enriches our experience of reading. Booth presents his case in a book that is crisply playful while at the same time thoroughly analytical. He demonstrates the lapses in logic and the irrational connections in examples of very different types of literature, showing how they come close to incoherence yet maintain for the reader a reliable order and purpose. Ultimately, Booth argues, literature gives us the capacity to cope effortlessly with, and even to transcend, the complicated and demanding mental experiences it generates for us. This book is in part a witty critique of the trends old and new of literary criticism, written by an accomplished and gifted scholar. But it is also a testimony to the power of the process of reading itself. *Precious Nonsense* is certain to bring pleasure to anyone interested in language and its beguiling possibilities.

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