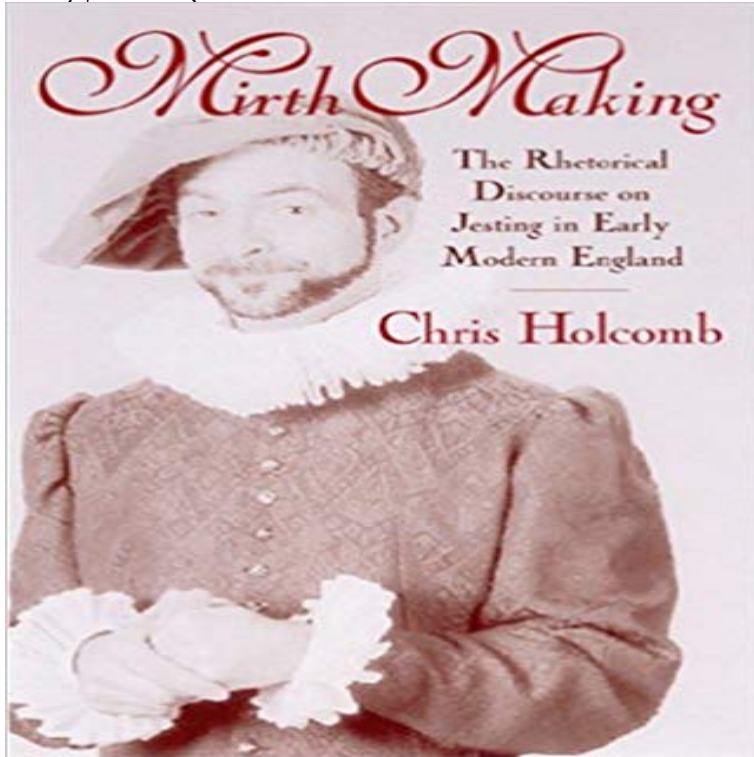


Mirth Making: The Rhetorical Discourse on Jestng in Early Modern England (Studies in Rhetoric/Communication)



MIRTH MAKING examines the complex and often contradictory ways in which writers of rhetoric and courtesy manuals during the English Renaissance counseled their readers on the powers and hazards of jestng. Shedding light on a subject largely neglected by contemporary scholars, Holcombs pathbreaking study demonstrates how such humor-related advice points to and participates in broader cultural phenomena - most notably the eras increase in social and geographic mobility and the contest between authority and subversion. Describing the English Renaissance as a brief but crucial phase in the history of jestng discourse, Holcomb differentiates humor-related counsel of the period from that of classical and medieval sources by its focus on communication between people of different stations. Holcomb shows that, in a changing society, handbook writers presented jestng as a socially conservative force and suggests that with a well-placed jest or quip, an orator might enhance his status and persuasive power or shame and ridicule those beneath him. Holcomb also recognizes, however, that rhetoricians confronted significant challenges as they sought to capture, explain, and teach a strategy both powerful and chaotic, elusive and ubiquitous, highly economical in form and potentially unpredictable in effect. Holcomb concludes that because of the disruptive energies inherent in jestng, rhetoricians of the English Renaissance could not escape the fact that jestng is always a flirtation with disaster.

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