

In resurrecting these long-forgotten tales and trials, Monson also draws attention to the predicament of modern religious women, whose “misbehavior”—seeking ordination as priests or refusing to give up their endowments to pay for priestly wrongdoing in their own archdioceses—continues even today. The nuns of early modern Italy, Monson shows, set the standard for religious transgression in their own age—and beyond.



**Craig A. Monson**

is professor of music at Washington University in St. Louis and the author of *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent*.

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“Monson’s book is a treasure hunt through the archives, uncovering hoards of gold: stories and characters from convent history, sad, bad, mad and scandalous enough to make a novelist’s mouth water.”

*Sarah Dunant, author of Sacred Hearts: A Novel*

“For centuries, more than three-quarters of upper-class women in Italy were immured in convents, willingly or not. From the Vatican Secret Archive, Craig Monson has worked like a detective to uncover the secrets of this closed world, revealing the yearnings and frustrations of women who were ‘dead to the world.’ This beautifully written, gripping book tells the stories of nuns who sought escape. Some just sang forbidden polyphony, one slipped out in disguise to catch the latest opera, and an entire convent burned down their cloister so they could all go home.”

“A very original take on remarkable material. Monson’s thorough and impeccable research into convents of Bologna yielded many cases of imaginative insubordination, and he tells the stories with evident surprise and amusement, imposing a light touch on subjects that were in their historical period and setting quite serious. Cleverly written.”

“Drawn from proceedings before the papal Congregation of Bishops and Regulars held in the Vatican Archive, the five true stories Craig Monson tells reveal much about the constrictions of convent life in Italy from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. As the subtitle makes clear, these are not titillating tales of sexual peccadilloes but accounts of nuns attempting in various ways to challenge the oppressive regimen imposed by their masculine superiors. Written in vivid informal prose by a seasoned researcher who knows his subject intimately, this masterpiece will amuse and inform a wide range of readers both within and beyond academic circles.”

*Anne Jacobson Schutte, University of Virginia*

“Fantastic stories of arson, magic, and nights at the opera—Monson presents a veritable *Canterbury Tales* detailing convent life in early modern Italy as seen through the adventures of unruly nuns. But unlike Chaucer’s classic work, all of these stories are true. Meticulously researched and carefully crafted, this book is a brilliant tour de force in its erudition. At the same time, it is a riveting page-turner that will interest scholars and general readers alike and also serve as an important resource for courses in gender studies, history, and music.”

*Jane A. Bernstein, Tufts University*

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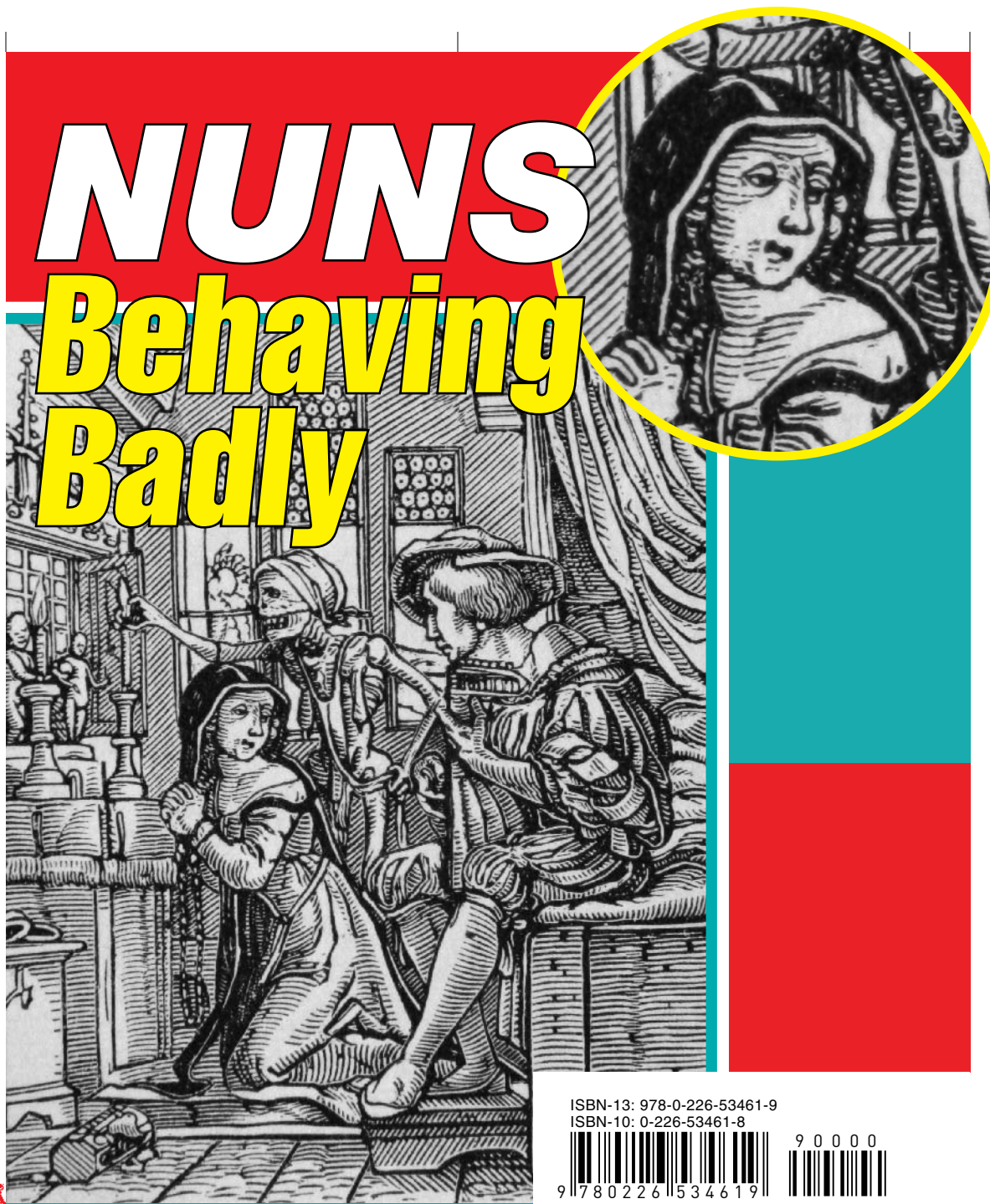
**NUNS BEHAVING BADLY**

**CRAIG A. MONSON**



**CHICAGO**

**NUNS**  
*Behaving Badly*



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**Tales of MUSIC, MAGIC, ART, & ARSON in the Convents of Italy**  
**Craig A. Monson**

**NUNS BEHAVING BADLY**

**Tales of MUSIC, MAGIC, ART, & ARSON in the Convents of Italy**

**Craig A. Monson**

**Witchcraft. Arson. Going AWOL.**

Some nuns in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy strayed far from the paradigms of monastic life. Cloistered in convents, subjected to stifling hierarchy, repressed, and occasionally persecuted by their male superiors, these women circumvented authority in sometimes extraordinary ways. But tales of their transgressions have long been buried in the Vatican Secret Archive. That is, until now.

In *Nuns Behaving Badly*, Craig A. Monson resurrects forgotten tales and restores to life the long-silent voices of these cloistered heroines. Here we meet nuns who dared speak out about physical assault and sexual impropriety (some real, some imagined). Others were only guilty of misjudgment or defacing valuable artwork that offended their sensibilities. But what unites the women and their stories is the challenges they faced: these were women trying to find their way within the Catholicism of their day and through the strict limits it imposed on them. Monson introduces us to women who were occasionally desperate to flee cloistered life, as when an entire community conspired to torch their convent and be set free. But more often, he shows us nuns just trying to live their lives. When they were crossed—by powerful priests who claimed to know what was best for them—bad behavior could escalate from mere troublemaking to open confrontation.

*(continued on back flap)*