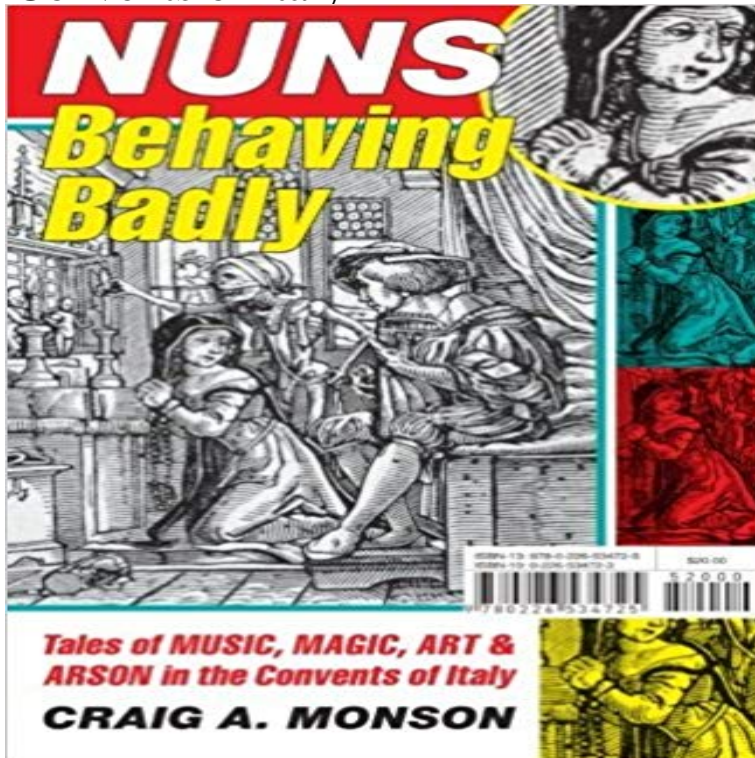


Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art, and Arson in the Convents of Italy



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. 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.

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