

Habitual Offenders: A True Tale of Nuns, Prostitutes, and Murderers in Seventeenth-Century Italy. Craig Monson.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. xvii + 334 pp. \$40.

On 1 April 1644, two nuns escaped from their convent in Bologna under cover of night. Fifteen months later, their bodies were discovered buried in the basement of a house across town. Both as a disappearance and then as a murder investigation, the nuns' case became a sensation that was woven by rumor, innuendo, and accusation into the fraught politics of the crumbling Barberini papacy and the tense relations between Rome and its subject city of Bologna. The priest who was the primary suspect died after torture, the mercenary who was his companion and likely collaborator was released for lack of evidence, and the Barberini functionary who may have helped them simply disappeared from the record.

Musicologist Craig Monson first came across the case in 1989, and collected bits and pieces of it over the following decades while carrying out research on the intersections of gender, religion, and music. His *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent* (1995) was an early landmark among studies that have explored nuns' individual and collective resistance to enclosure after Trent. In *Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art, and Arson in the Convents of Italy* (2010) and *Divas in the Convent: Nuns, Music, and Defiance in Seventeenth Century Italy* (2012) Monson expanded, updated, and dramatized the same tense dynamics, and moved steadily into more complicated territory and more entertaining narrative. With *Habitual Offenders* he moves beyond music and into politics and the justice system. While nuns are still central to the story, they are not the main actors. Monson has painstakingly reconstructed the case, working in the first instance with the thick volume from the Roman State Archive that holds the testimony of over 180 witnesses in well over 2,000 pages. Archival work in Bologna, Florence, Venice, Paris, and elsewhere more than doubled the number of pages and filled in many gaps. Monson uses transcripts of witness testimony to re-create the investigative techniques of the ambitious Roman prosecutor Giandomenico Rossi as he moved from prison to convent to torture cell; he draws on the letters of the principals, the directives by which authorities aimed to push the investigation forward, and the petitions by which defendants aimed to hold it back. The range of sources gives us an ever clearer sense of the contortions, conflicts, and contradictions of the early modern judicial process.

We also gain a clearer sense of the world of seventeenth-century convents, or at least of a very distinct type among them. The murdered nuns, Sister Silveria Catterina and Sister Laura Vittoria, had escaped from the Convertite, that is, the convent meant as a reformatory for prostitutes leaving the profession. Some women entered these homes voluntarily, others under duress, but all were adult women with histories, families, and networks that stretched out into the city, with the result that the atmosphere at the convent was not always marked by either solitude or spirituality. The two nuns

continued to be known, both in and outside the enclosure, by the professional nicknames they had used on the street, “La Generona” and “La Rossa,” respectively. The Convertite home ran a laundry business to help pay the bills, and La Generona and La Rossa were active and engaged entrepreneurs who did business directly with the gentlemen who came, often personally, to drop off their laundry. The other nuns thought them shameless flirts, and were not particularly surprised when they disappeared.

Monson details how diverse convent communities were, disrupting early modern prescriptions and modern assumptions alike. The effort to convey that diversity fully does sometimes multiply the trees to the detriment of our view of the forest, and it is too easy to get lost in the narrative. He considers witness testimony to be generally reliable, and translates and edits it heavily for modern readability. The social and political context frames the narrative more than it informs it. This is, in the end, less a microhistory than a condensed transcript with commentary of a long and convoluted case that opens with drama and dies through disinterest. That said, following a particular judicial process so closely allows us to see why so few had confidence in a system that protected the interests of everyone but the victims it was supposedly meant to serve.

Nicholas Terpstra, *University of Toronto*

Infanticide, Secular Justice, and Religious Debate in Early Modern Europe.
Adriano Prospero.

Trans. Hilary Siddons. Europa Sacra 10. Turnhout: Brepols, 2016. viii + 408 pp.
€110.

While demographic and anthropological studies on infanticide abound, few historians have addressed the subject. Adriano Prospero, through the analysis of an infanticide in Bologna in 1709, where the accused, Lucia Cremonini, was condemned to death, crosses with great mastery the study of a judicial source with the history of ways of thinking, religion, and rituals in the context of the Italian Counter-Reformation. The first part, “The Story” (chapters 1–3), is the one most closely related to the judicial documents from the Bologna archives, the Archivio del Torrione. We learn that Lucia has lost her honor to an unnamed priest. A forensic examination of the newborn’s body reveals that his throat was cut and this injury caused death. Lucia finally confesses to infanticide. Prospero exploits this crime as familiar territory. Uppermost is the Counter-Reformation, and the impossibility, for Prospero, of writing the history of infanticide only as a social practice or an offense. He explores the link with abortion and the death of the newborn without baptism—considered a nonperson—and shows the passage of the prosecution of infanticide as a fault by the church to its being an offense punishable by laws. The woman is the only protagonist, until the mitigation of the death penalty in