



Sanctified Subversives: Nuns in Early Modern English and Spanish Literature

Horacio Sierra

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As chaste women devoted to God, nuns are viewed as the purest of the pure. Yet, as females who reject courtship, sex, marriage, child bearing, and materialism, they have been the anathema of how society has proscribed, expected, and regulated women: sex object, wife, mother, and capitalist consumer. They are perceived as otherworldly beings, yet revered for their salt-of-the-earth demeanor. This book illustrates how both English and Spanish Renaissance-era authors latched onto the figure of the nun as a way to evaluate the social construction of womanhood. This analysis of the nun's role in the popular imagination via literature explores how writers on both sides of the Catholic-Protestant divide employed the role of the nun to showcase the powerful potential these women possessed in acting out as sanctified subversives. The texts under consideration include William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure*, María de Zayas's *The Disenchantments of Love*, Aphra Behn's *The History of the Nun*, Catalina de Erauso's *The Lieutenant Nun*, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's autobiographical and literary works. No other book addresses these issues through a concentrated study of these authors and their literary works, much less by offering an in-depth discussion of the literature and culture of seventeenth-century England, Spain, and Mexico.

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