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Review of *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* by Barbara Hanawalt

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Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England.

Barbara Hanawalt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. xiv + 208. \$19.95.

Barbara Hanawalt presents her audience with an engaging and thoughtful set of interlocking essays that will be of interest to scholars in a variety of disciplines and yet is also accessible to students. In her acknowledgments, Hanawalt expresses her appreciation to her colleagues in literature who have helped her to read medieval texts—whether literary or historical—with a more critical eye, and Hanawalt's subtle readings of a wide range of late medieval English texts beautifully demonstrates how well a historian can use what she has learned from other disciplines. She demonstrates her awareness of voice and of the importance of the shaping strategies of narratives. The overarching theme that ties her essays together is the importance of reputation [repute as in the title]. Some of her essays concern themselves specifically with late medieval London, while others are more broad ranging in looking at the distinctions between urban and country life. She continually explores the impact of law on individuals and the community. Unlike some scholars who use gender as another term for talking exclusively about women, Hanawalt is concerned about both women and men's experience, and the differences that cultural expectations about sex roles make.

Many of the themes that Hanawalt explores in this collection are at the cutting edge of medieval and Renaissance studies today. She analyzes such issues as physical space and how its designations were gendered; for example, the house would be woman's space but the tavern was more ambiguous: men came as patrons but women served, an extension of their roles in domestic space. She also examines the social implications of legal cases and how they can be read as cultural texts. Another important question she addresses is the social construction of family and childhood. She suggests how carefully we must examine evidence and argues for the significance of the gender of the voice of the person who tells the tale. Hanawalt also emphasizes the importance of belief systems—how rumors have lives of their own even if what was being repeated was not “factually” true. I found her references to the different meanings of the Robin Hood legends very valuable, particularly in terms of how the Robin Hood ballads in the Middle Ages represented a male culture. The England Hanawalt explores is a full one with not only women and men, but also people of different ethnic backgrounds: Jewish poachers slaughtered deer differently than the rest of the population so that the meat would be kosher.

Hanawalt's methodology is clearly interdisciplinary, and she uses the work not only of literary scholars but also of anthropologists and sociologists. She helps us gain a greater understanding of power relationships, of who was included or excluded, and how those

who had control could use community values to force compliance with the law. Hanawalt's work will be interesting for students, particularly those who want to see connections between earlier periods and our own. For example, "Fur-Collar Crime: The Pattern of Crime among the Fourteenth-Century English Nobility" examines the patterns of crime for those with privilege in the late Middle Ages, and how they used their status to commit different sorts of criminal activity from those of people of lower status. She then compares her medieval examples with "white collar" criminals today. Just as in our own age where white collar crime often has lighter punishments or the opportunity to plea bargain, so too in the fourteenth century, mighty subjects who committed misdeeds might well be subject to exile instead of execution.

One of the finest essays in the collection, "Whose Story Was This? Rape Narratives in Medieval English Courts," analyzes three different accounts of the rape of an eleven-year-old London girl, Joan Saddler: hers, her attacker's, and finally the discussion of the justices who hear the case. In the medieval—and well into the modern—period women who charged rape had little chance of a successful prosecution, and this was the case with Joan. And indeed, as Hanawalt suggests and other research confirms, there were very few charges of rape in this period. Hanawalt draws powerful parallels between the experience of medieval and modern rape victims. She also impressively demonstrates the limits of historical research, ending her essay by admitting we cannot know what happened afterwards to Joan Saddler, or even if she survived a year beyond her rape.

Hanawalt's study is an excellent one that should find a wide audience of readers. Scholars and students, literary critics and historians, will all find this book of value.

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