Addressing the history of the production and reception of the great medieval poem, *Piers Plowman*, Lawrence Warner reveals the many ways in which scholars, editors, and critics over the centuries created their own speculative narratives about the poem, which gradually came to be regarded as factually true. Warner begins by considering the possibility that Langland wrote a romance about a werewolf and bear-suited lovers, and goes on to explore the methods of the poem’s localization, and medieval readers’ particular interest in its Latinity. Warner shows that the “Protestant Piers” was a reaction against the poem’s oral mode of transmission, reveals the extensive eighteenth-century textual scholarship on the poem by figures including the maligned Chaucer editor John Urry, and contextualizes its first modernization by a literary forger inspired by the 1790s Shakespeare controversies. This lively account of *Piers Plowman* challenges the way the poem has traditionally been read and understood.

**Lawrence Warner** is Senior Lecturer in Medieval English at King’s College London and Director of the International Piers Plowman Society. His book, *The Lost History of Piers Plowman: The Earliest Transmission of Langland’s Work* (2011), received Honorable Mention for the 2013 Richard J. Finneran Award of the Society for Textual Scholarship.
CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

GENERAL EDITOR
Alastair Minnis, Yale University

EDITORIAL BOARD
Zygmunt G. Barański, University of Cambridge
Christopher C. Baswell, Barnard College and Columbia University
John Burrow, University of Bristol
Mary Carruthers, New York University
Rita Copeland, University of Pennsylvania
Roberta Frank, Yale University
Simon Gaunt, King’s College London
Steven Kruger, City University of New York
Nigel Palmer, University of Oxford
Winthrop Wetherbee, Cornell University
Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Fordham University

This series of critical books seeks to cover the whole area of literature written in the major medieval languages – the main European vernaculars, and medieval Latin and Greek – during the period c.1100–1500. Its chief aim is to publish and stimulate fresh scholarship and criticism on medieval literature, special emphasis being placed on understanding major works of poetry, prose, and drama in relation to the contemporary culture and learning which fostered them.

RECENT TITLES IN THE SERIES

Antony J. Hasler
Court Poetry in Late Medieval England and Scotland: Allegories of Authority
Shannon Gayk
Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England
Lisa H. Cooper
Artisans and Narrative Craft in Late-Medieval England
Alison Cornish
Vernacular Translation in Dante’s Italy: Illiterate Literature
Jane Gilbert
Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature
Jessica Rosenfeld
Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love after Aristotle
Michael Van Dussen
From England to Bohemia: Heresy and Communication in the Later Middle Ages
Martin Eisner
Boccaccio and the Invention of Italian Literature: Dante, Petrarch, Cavalcanti, and the Authority of the Vernacular
Emily V. Thornbury
Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England

A complete list of titles in the series can be found at the end of the volume.
THE MYTH OF *PIERS PLOWMAN*

*Constructing a Medieval Literary Archive*

LAWRENCE WARNER
For my father, Seth L. Warner, and in memory of my mother,
Emily Rose Warner
Contents

List of figures
Page viii
Acknowledgments
x
List of abbreviations
xiii
A note on citations
xiv

Introduction: archive fever and the madness of Joseph Ritson
1

1 William and the werewolf: the problem of William of Palerne
22

2 Localizing Piers Plowman C: Meed, Corfe castle, and the London Riot of 1384
37

3 Latinitas et communitas Visionis Wilhelmi de Langlond
53

4 “Quod piers plowman”: non-reformist prophecy, c.1520–1555
72

5 Urry, Burrell, and the pains of John Taylor: the Spelman MS, 1709–1766
87

6 William Dupré, fabricateur: Piers Plowman in the age of forgery, c.1794–1802
106

Conclusion: Leland’s madness and the tale of Piers Plowman
129

Notes
141
Bibliography
187
Index of manuscripts, early printed books, annotated books, and portraits
209
General index
213
Figures

1 Ritson’s list of difficult words and “memorable particulars.”
Lehigh University Library 821.1 L265p 1550 [Endmatter 4].
Special Collections, Lehigh University Libraries, Bethlehem,
Pennsylvania, USA.

2 Ritson’s transcription of Harley 3954’s final lines. Lehigh
University Library 821.1 L265p 1550 [Endmatter 6].
Special Collections, Lehigh University Libraries, Bethlehem,
Pennsylvania, USA.

3 Lines of transmission of the two C-text MS families.

4 Latin lines following on from the MS’s Piers Plowman.

5 Latin lines from Piers Plowman transcribed in a Crowley.
New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale
University, ID L 26 550c, sig. 4v.

6 “Two monks’ heads” prophecy in The Winchester Anthology.
London, British Library, Additional MS 60577, fol. 212r.
© The British Library Board, ADD 60577 f212r.

7 Ownership inscription in The Winchester Anthology. London,
British Library, Additional MS 60577, end pastedown.
© The British Library Board, ADD 60577 (back inside).

8 Another “Davy the dykar” poem. London, British Library,
MS Sloane 2578, fol. 27r. © The British Library Board, Sloane
2578 f27r.

9 Ownership inscriptions at the opening of Piers Plowman. San
Marino, Huntington Library, MS Hm 114, fol. r. This
item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library,
San Marino, California.

10 Urry’s reference to the Spelman MS in his transcription of Crowley’s
List of figures

11 Urry’s comparison of Piers Plowman to Homer. Oxford, Balliol College 525.a.1, sig. B.ii°. 90
12 Burrell’s collations of Cr with the Spelman and Harley MSS. Oxford, Bodleian Library 4° Rawlinson 272, sig. I.iv°. 95
13 Burrell’s transcription of C 5.1–27 (omitting 21) from the Spelman MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library 4° Rawlinson 272, flyleaf after sig. E.iv°. 97
15 From Dupré’s modernization of Piers Plowman. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 323, fol. i°. 122
16 Douce’s notes on Dupré and the pilgrim. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 104, opening at fols. 33a°–33b°. 126
I begin by acknowledging three scholars I have met or corresponded with only in passing, but who in effect created the field to which this book contributes, and who, if I might wear my hat as Director of the International Piers Plowman Society for a moment, deserve the deepest gratitude of the Langland community: John Alford, Vincent DiMarco, and Charlotte Brewer. The smallest of their contributions to this book were Professor Alford’s invitation for me to be respondent to the *Piers Plowman Electronic Archive* panel at the 1999 Asheville Langland conference, which changed my life; Professor DiMarco’s characteristically cheerful help regarding a small bibliographical problem; and Dr. Brewer’s generous responses to queries about, and provision of copies of, the editorial work on the poem in London in the 1920s.

Among those who responded to portions of this book in draft form, I am especially grateful to Emily Steiner, who read all of it just as she was completing *Reading Piers Plowman*. That is true dedication, and her deep knowledge of the poem, and ear for tone the equal of Brian Wilson’s, helped me improve it greatly. Others who provided generous feedback on portions of this book are A. S. G. Edwards, David Matthews, R. Carter Hailey (scholar and gentleman, who in many ways inspired me to undertake the second half of this book), and Simon Horobin, who also provided hospitality at Magdalen College and the University of Oxford, and urged me to continue looking into the identity of “Mr. Dupré” even after he had independently made his own initial inquiries. Over the years I have presented much of this material at conferences and seminars, and would like to acknowledge in particular, for their rigorous feedback and conversation, the audiences of the *Piers Plowman Electronic Archive* Seminar, Los Angeles, 2009; the London Old and Middle English Research Seminar, March 2011 (thanks to Ruth Kennedy and Cath Nall); and the Fifth International Piers Plowman Society conference, Oxford, April 2011.
Acknowledgments

For helping me figure out who all the people who populate this book were, and what they were writing, annotating, printing, and doing, thanks to a pleasingly diverse body of scholars: Michael J. Bennett, Tekla Bude, Megan Cook, Rebecca Davis, John H. Farrant, Alexandra Gillespie, Michael Johnston, Eileen Joy, Sarah Kelen, Paul Patterson, Tom Prendergast, Macklin Smith, and Neil Vickers. Let me single out Ian Cornelius, who consulted all the Crowley and Rogers copies at Harvard and Yale on my behalf, and alerted me to Latin interests of one owner. And, again, Andrew Cole and Fiona Somerset have been the truest and best of Langland friends, both as co-editors of YLS and as wicked smart advisors and founts of learning.

I am happy to record my thanks to the archivists and librarians who provided access to, images of, and advice about the many manuscripts and early printed books that feature here, in particular the staffs of: Balliol College Library, Oxford, especially Jeremy Hinchliff and Seamus Perry; the Beinecke Library of Yale University; the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the British Library, especially Bevan Blanchard and Giles Mandelbrote; the Huntington Library, San Marino, especially Mary Robertson; Lehigh University Library, Pennsylvania, especially Lois Black and Ilhan Citak; and the National Portrait Gallery, London, especially Matthew Bailey; all of whom kindly granted permission to reproduce materials from their collections. I also quote from or refer to materials from other libraries: thanks to Magill Library, Haverford College, Pennsylvania, especially Ann Upton; the University of Michigan Library, especially Peggy Daub and Sarah Rentz; and the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, especially Jan McDonald. Two owners of Crowley editions, Professor Toshi Takamiya and the collector who now owns the copy inscribed by Alexander Pope and Thomas Warton, were generous in sharing information.

The University of Sydney Faculty of Arts and Department of English provided research support and study leave in 2011, during which much of this book came together. I am especially grateful to Will Christie and Paul Giles, and, for advice and friendship, to all my colleagues there and across Australia, especially Dan Anlezark, Geraldine Barnes, Mark Byron, Margaret Clunies Ross, Louise D’Arcens, Stephanie Downes, Huw Griffiths, Nick Riemer, the force of life called Stephanie Trigg, and Andrea Williams. I acknowledge the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies for awarding me an Australian Bicentennial Fellowship, which I spent at the English Department at King’s College London, spring 2011. Clare Lees, not for the first time, was a wonderfully supportive mentor at King’s; she joined Chair of Department Jo McDonagh, Sarah Salih, and Beatrice
Acknowledgments

Wilford in making me feel most welcome – so welcome that I returned permanently in 2013. I acknowledge the Department of English and the School of Arts and Humanities of King’s for providing support of the production costs of this book. Among my new London colleagues I would like to thank Isabel Davis and Alfred Hiatt in particular for their friendship.

Linda Bree, Anna Bond, Fiona Sewell, and Vania Cunha have been exemplary editors at Cambridge University Press, where, happily, my distant cousin and close friend Lynn Hieatt worked so long and well. I am also grateful to series general editor Alistair Minnis and to the two anonymous readers whose trenchant feedback was very helpful.

A portion of the Introduction originally appeared in *The La Trobe Journal*, published by the State Library of Victoria Foundation; I am grateful to its editor John Arnold. Chapters 1 and 4 are heavily revised versions of essays originally published in *Viator* and *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*. Thanks to Simon Forde and Guy Carney of Brepols; Andy Kelly and Blair Sullivan of the UCLA Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies; and the anonymous readers of those earlier chapters (two of whom, John M. Bowers on Langland and *William of Palerne* and R. Carter Hailey on the sixteenth-century *Piers Plowman*, identified themselves). Much of the Conclusion was published in *The Chaucer Review* 48.1 (2013): 113–28; I am grateful to the Pennsylvania State University Press for permission to reproduce it here.

Janice Marjoribanks and the late Kevin Marjoribanks have been unstintingly supportive. I am in awe of Jan’s willingness to go along for the ride. My beautiful wife Genevieve and delightful children Sebastian and Eloise: I will always think of this as our London book, which we all lived together, and laughed about, from our Islington headquarters, waiting for a taxi to take us to the London Eye and to the rest of the world. (Sebastian, there are plenty of candidates in here for you to dress up as next Book Day. I’d go with the werewolf.) I love you forever. Finally, my deepest thanks go to my parents, Seth L. Warner and the late Emily Rose Warner, for the enduring example, love, and support they have always provided. One of my cherished possessions is the copy of the hardback *Riverside Chaucer* they gave me to commemorate Kalamazoo, 1990: an early sign that they would not mind seeing where this obsession with Middle English might take me. This book, which I dedicate to them, is a small way to repay them for everything.
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>British Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>Joseph Ritson’s <em>Bibliographia Poetica</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cr¹, Cr², Cr³</td>
<td>Robert Crowley’s first, second, and third editions of <em>The Vision of Pierce Plowman</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUL</td>
<td>Cambridge University Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EETS</td>
<td>Early English Text Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELH</td>
<td><em>English Literary History</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEGP</td>
<td><em>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAE</td>
<td><em>Medium Ævum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td><em>Modern Philology</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N&amp;Q</td>
<td><em>Notes &amp; Queries</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODNB</td>
<td><em>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMLA</td>
<td><em>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPEA</td>
<td>Piers Plowman Electronic Archive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RES</td>
<td><em>Review of English Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YLS</td>
<td><em>Yearbook of Langland Studies</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A note on citations