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978-1-107-04363-3 - The Myth of Piers Plowman: Constructing a Medieval Literary Archive

Lawrence Warner

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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.

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*For my father, Seth L. Warner, and in memory of my mother,
Emily Rose Warner*

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Abbreviations

BL	British Library
BP	Joseph Ritson's <i>Bibliographia Poetica</i>
Cr ¹ , Cr ² , Cr ³	Robert Crowley's first, second, and third editions of <i>The Vision of Pierce Plowman</i>
CUL	Cambridge University Library
EETS	Early English Text Society
ELH	<i>English Literary History</i>
JEGP	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
MÆ	<i>Medium Ævum</i>
MP	<i>Modern Philology</i>
N&Q	<i>Notes & Queries</i>
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
PPEA	<i>Piers Plowman Electronic Archive</i>
RES	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
YLS	<i>Yearbook of Langland Studies</i>

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A note on citations

In citing Middle English and Latin, I standardize i/j and u/v and sometimes silently depart from editorial punctuation. For sixteenth-century texts, I alter “ye” (i.e., thorn and e) to “the” silently, but for eighteenth-century texts I leave it as is. Quotations from editions of *Piers Plowman* are presented in what seems most likely to be its poet’s language: those from C are from George Russell and George Kane, eds., *Piers Plowman: The C Version* (London: Athlone Press, 1997); those from A and B adopt the substantive readings and follow the line numbering of George Kane, ed., *Piers Plowman: The A Version*, rev. edn. (London: Athlone Press, 1988), and George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson, eds., *Piers Plowman: The B Version*, rev. edn. (London: Athlone Press, 1988), but present the language in the form of the text of the C edition. I do not reproduce editorial brackets. See my discussion in *The Lost History of Piers Plowman: The Earliest Transmission of Langland’s Work* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), xv–xvii.