

THE MYTH OF *PIERS PLOWMAN*

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



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107043633

© Lawrence Warner 2014

This version is published under a Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivatives licence. This licence allows the content to be redistributed, as commercial or non-commercial products, as long as it is unchanged and the entire content, and attribution credited to the original.

To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/>.

First published 2014

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Warner, Lawrence, 1968–

The myth of Piers Plowman : constructing a medieval literary archive / Lawrence Warner.
pages cm. – (Cambridge studies in medieval literature ; 89)

ISBN 978-1-107-04363-3 (Hardback)

1. Langland, William, 1330?–1400?–Criticism and interpretation.
2. Langland, William, 1330?–1400?–Authorship.
3. Langland, William, 1330?–1400? Piers Plowman–Criticism, Textual. I. Title.

PR2015.W37 2014

821'.1–dc23 2013033226

ISBN 978-1-107-04363-3 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.