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.

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Constructing a Medieval Literary Archive

LAWRENCE WARNER



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