

Call for Papers
International *Piers Plowman* Society Conference
London, July 6-8, 2023
Due Date for Submissions: September 5, 2022

The conference theme “*Piers Plowman* Today” invites participants to think about how and why we read *Piers Plowman* now and what future directions Langland scholarship might take. While the program committee welcomes proposals on *any* topic related to Langland studies, we particularly invite papers that engage with the conference theme, broadly construed. Possible topics include the history of Langland studies, the poem’s afterlives, approaches to pedagogy, issues of topicality and temporality, and Langlandian interventions in contemporary questions of social justice, post-pandemic recovery, and ecological concern. Building on insights generated by the *Piers Plowman* Expo (2021) and the *Piers Plowman* Reading Group (2020-22), we might consider not only how reading the poem *now* enables us to reflect on our contemporary moment, but also how contemporary concerns and interpretive practices can help us read *Piers Plowman* in new ways.

In addition to papers that address the conference theme, IPPS welcome papers on a wide array of topics, including the literary, historical, religious, intellectual, textual-codicological, and critical contexts of *Piers Plowman* and related poetry and prose in the traditions of didactic and allegorical alliterative writing. We also welcome papers on Langland’s contemporaries, including Chaucer.

A note on remote participation: while the conference venue is not equipped to run a fully-hybrid program, we are hopeful that we will be able to provide some streaming and asynchronous access to a limited number of talks and sessions. We are also exploring options for those who are unable to attend the conference in person but still wish to present a paper. If you anticipate that you will need remote accommodations, please contact Rebecca Davis (radavis@uci.edu) when you submit your proposal.

General Guidelines

- Applicants are invited to submit paper abstracts either to the General Call (any topic) or to an Individual Session (listed below). Each applicant may submit one abstract. Abstracts that are not able to be included in an Individual Session will be referred automatically to the General Call for further consideration.
- All abstracts should be sent to the conference general mailbox ippslondon2023@gmail.com rather than to session organizers. If you are sending your abstract to an Individual Session, please put the name of the session in the subject line of the email.
- Abstracts should be no longer than 300 words and should include the name and email address of the applicant.
- Questions about particular sessions should be directed to the organizers. If you have more general questions or concerns about the program, please feel free to contact Rebecca Davis (radavis@uci.edu).

- The program committee for this year’s conference is:
 - Chair: Rebecca Davis, University of California, Irvine (radavis@uci.edu)
 - Louise Bishop, University of Oregon (lmbishop@uoregon.edu)
 - Tekla Bude, Oregon State University (budet@oregonstate.edu)
 - Richard H. Godden, Louisiana State University (rgodden1@lsu.edu)
 - Curtis Gruenler, Hope College (gruenler@hope.edu)
 - Bernardo S. Hinojosa, St. Norbert College (bds.hinojosa@gmail.com)
 - Ellen Rentz, Claremont McKenna College (Ellen.Rentz@ClaremontMcKenna.edu)
 - Jamie K. Taylor, Bryn Mawr College (jktaylor@brynmaur.edu)
 - Nicolette Zeeman, King’s College Cambridge (nz202@cam.ac.uk)

List of Individual Sessions

1. Afterlives of *Piers Plowman*

Organizer: Sarah Tolmie, University of Waterloo (stolmie@uwaterloo.ca)

This panel seeks to make the case for the ongoingness of *Piers Plowman* as a cultural project. A tremendous amount of expertise has been directed at where this poem comes from, and how it functioned in its time; now is the time to consider its posterity. To keep Langland in our curricula, we need to make him current: not by tepid claims about “relatability,” but by establishing his vital connection to artistic productions that came after him, as well as to the arts of the future.

Do you know of works of art in modernity — let’s say, any time after World War I — that are indebted to *Piers Plowman*? In any genre or medium? Operas, plays, poems, novels, illustrations, installations, games? If so, please come and share them with us. We want to hear from people who have made or participated in such works of art, and from scholars who are working on them. This panel is also open to nineteenth-century (and later) engagements with *Piers* that pertain more to social engagement or activism: roles the poem might have had in preaching, protesting, missionary activity, reform or anything else performed in the public sphere.

We are looking for informal talks of about 7 minutes introducing the work or activity in question and its relationship to Langland. Thereafter we will hold a Q and A session, moderated by Sarah Tolmie, directing a few questions to the panelists and then opening up the floor to audience members.

2. *Piers*, Aesthetics and the Alliterative Tradition

Organizer: Katharine Jager, University of Houston (jagerk@uhd.edu)

In order to position alliterative verse within the larger “formalist turn” in medieval studies, this panel considers questions of poetic form, “new formalism,” and aesthetics within *Piers Plowman* and the late medieval English alliterative tradition more broadly. Given that the poem is so deeply concerned with the social, ethical, and theological purpose of “makyng” poetry, how then does *Piers* express, manifest, perform, complicate, create literary form? Can we separate the poetic product from the maker of the poem? How does identity intersect with poetic form, within *Piers*

Plowman? What is the role of the author in a poem constituted by revision and variation? What might a “new formalist” reading of *Piers* consider? This panel seeks a variety of interpretive approaches and close readings of the poem, its formal construction, and the aesthetic possibilities it offers.

3. *Piers Plowman* and Medieval Jewish-Christian Relations

Organizer: Hope Doherty, Durham University (elizabeth.h.doherty@durham.ac.uk)

This session would provide the opportunity to explore the world of *Piers Plowman* in relation to the exciting new work being done on Jewish-Christian conflict and dialogue in the European Middle Ages. Recent new work in this area has touched on theories of supersessionism, race, heredity, gender, apocalyptic and eschatological thought, Anglo-Jewish records, anti-Judaic Middle English and Latin literature, and iconography. Papers in this session might explore topics including the presentation of Jewish characters in *Piers Plowman*; links between *Piers Plowman* and medieval Jewish thought and literature; Langland’s articulations of supersessionist theology; potential links between *Piers Plowman* and polemical texts, either anti-Judaic or anti-Christian; portrayals of non-Christians, or pre-Christians, in *Piers Plowman*; the relationship between Langland’s personified Sins and anti-Judaism; and links between Langland’s medical imagery and religious conflict, exclusion, or dialogue.

4. The Manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*

Organizers: Simon Horobin, Magdalen College Oxford (simon.horobin@magd.ox.ac.uk) and Michael Johnston, Purdue University (mjohnst@purdue.edu)

While the manuscripts of *Piers Plowman* have long been central to our understanding of this poem, and while scholarship has revealed much, there is still a lot we have to discover: Where, outside of London, was the poem copied? Did religious houses play a major role in disseminating this text? What sorts of scribes copied the poem? Who were some of the earliest owners? With what other texts did the poem tend to travel? Are there as-yet undiscovered connections between multiple copies of the poem? Was *Piers Plowman* produced in a different or similar way to copies of Gower or Chaucer? Continuing to work on these perennial questions will help scholars better understand the place of *Piers* within the literary and cultural history of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England.

We are open to a broad range of methodological approaches, such as traditional codicological, paleographical, text-critical, and dialectal analyses. But we are also open to Digital Humanities attempts to map and organize manuscript information, as well as literary readings of the texts across any given manuscript containing *Piers Plowman*. And we welcome papers focused on a single manuscript or papers that survey multiple copies of the poem.

5. Virtuous Activity

Organizer: Laura Hatch, Brigham Young University (hatch.laura@gmail.com)

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle sets forward a definition of virtue that goes beyond simple morality, instead exploring human capacities for action. Reaching back into the antique roots of virtue (coming from the Latin *vir*, “man”), Langland’s allegorical dream vision *Piers Plowman* is

a psychomachia deeply concerned with the lived, mortal experience of discerning what it means to do well. The concept of virtue speaks to the heart of the poem's investment in the powers, capacities, and skills enacted to navigate an infinite variety of enigmatic experience. This panel invites a wide approach to the concept of virtue, whether specific personifications or descriptions of virtues within *Piers Plowman* (e.g., Truth, Grace, Charity, Wit) or exhibitions of virtues by characters within the poem (e.g., courage, resilience, friendship, judgment, patience, hope). This panel also welcomes approaches to virtue located in related spheres and texts outside of the poem *Piers Plowman* itself – for instance, virtue and dream-visions or romance; affective virtue and personification allegory; virtue and faculty psychology in the Middle Ages.

As we face an increasingly uncertain world, the need for explorations of ethical behavior and ethical decision-making feels more and more relevant. This panel welcomes papers on *Piers Plowman* in relation to the topic of virtuous activity, but also papers on this topic more generally, including from scholars who do not see themselves as Langland specialists.

6. New Ways of Thinking about the Rhythm of *Piers Plowman*: Does Langland Have the Beat?

Organizers: Thomas Cable, University of Texas, Austin (tcable@mail.utexas.edu) and Noriko Inoue, Kansai University (n-inoue@kansai-u.ac.jp)

Metrical analysis of Middle English verse typically uses the methods of historical linguistics, a respectable way of answering the questions that must come first: for example, “Was final *-e* pronounced?” This way of doing things typically involves scanning thousands of lines and matching the results against each other and against the generalizations of the historical grammars. Much has been discovered in recent years through this labor-intensive approach by prosodists oriented toward Langland. However, all of us have fallen short in not engaging the principles of rhythm in an explicit way. What is the *point* of these elegant descriptions of the careful placing of syllables in each half-line? Recent work in cognitive science shows a connection between the perception of beats in both music and language and the motor areas of the brain, which prompt the body to anticipate the beat and to move with it. The organizers of this session invite idiosyncratic approaches to the *rhythm* of *Piers Plowman*, beyond the familiar approaches to its *meter*. We welcome links across disciplines (poetics, music, cognitive science, kinesiology, poetry in performance), as well as discoveries in traditional metrics, that suggest how the rhythms of Langland's lines can be embodied and read with a tangibility comparable to the tapping of lines in a Shakespeare sonnet.

7. The History and Future of Langland Studies and the International *Piers Plowman* Society

Organizers: Louise Bishop, University of Oregon (lbishop@uoregon.edu) and Nicolette Zeeman, University of Cambridge (nz202@cam.ac.uk)

Conceived as a capacious strand with both standard papers and potential roundtable discussions, participants are invited to think about the past and the ongoing evolution of both *Piers Plowman* studies and the International *Piers Plowman* Society. What are the intellectual and institutional roots and the explicit and implicit purposes of Langland studies? How does study of the poem relate to larger patterns of historical, critical and theoretical study, not to mention other areas of

medieval scholarship? How did the creation of the International *Piers Plowman* Society relate to the history of Langland studies before the society's formation? What challenges did the society's founders encounter, and how were they met – or not met? Organizers also welcome attention to how scholarly societies and scholarship itself has changed in the last three/four decades. What constitutes the future of the International *Piers Plowman* Society in light of both continuity and change? We also welcome analyses and impressions that treat topics such as the role and impact of the *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, the *Piers Plowman* Electronic Archive, or the Penn Commentary on *Piers Plowman*. Papers can treat singular factors, forms, and characters, as well as complex layers of intentions that prompted a confederation devoted to the study of this poem.

8. Hooked on a Feeling

Organizer: Emily Steiner, University of Pennsylvania (steinere@english.upenn.edu)

Inspired by Rita Copeland's landmark *Emotion and the History of Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (OUP, 2022), this session invites participants to explore the range of emotions that fuel *Piers Plowman* and other medieval alliterative poems. How does *Piers Plowman* fit into larger literary and intellectual histories of emotion, and how do its interlocutors use emotion to persuade or dissuade others? Is alliterative poetry a vehicle for some emotions and not others? In later medieval literature, how might the capacity for feeling and expressing emotion correspond to gender, class, and race? In the spirit of the conference's theme, "*Piers Plowman* Today," we might ask whether medieval emotions can teach us to feel and act, and what role emotion might play in modern interpretations of premodern literature.

9. At Ease

Organizer: Emily Steiner, University of Pennsylvania (steinere@english.upenn.edu) and Spencer Strub, Princeton (spencer.strub@gmail.com)

One of the most remarkable features of *Piers Plowman* is its thoroughgoing investigation of labor: the rewards of physical labor and the suffering that it entails, the metaphorical possibilities of agricultural work, the relationship between work and poverty, and the value of spiritual or intellectual work. Indeed, the most common image on modern editions of the poem is the medieval plow. The poet himself is often viewed as a workaholic. Somewhat less explored by modern scholars - and the subject of this session - is Langland's interest in various forms of not working: procrastination and idleness, yes, but also pleasure, play, ease, rest, and sleep. How do *Piers Plowman* and other alliterative poems understand non-productivity and non-work? How might Langland's poem create opportunity and space for rest? And how might our contemporary concerns with market-driven academic work, work/life balance, time management, antiwork communities, workers' organization and labor exploitation intersect with medieval notions of work and ease?

10. *Piers Plowman* Studies and Race

Organizer: Bernardo S. Hinojosa, St. Norbert College (bds.hinojosa@gmail.com)

In his posthumously published memoir, Stuart Hall recounts how, during his time at Oxford, he unsuccessfully approached an unnamed professor—almost certainly J.R.R. Tolkien—with plans “to do graduate work on Langland's *Piers Plowman*.” This refusal, Kathy Lavezzo suggests, “has led medievalists to opine what might have happened to Langland scholarship had the brilliant thinker

been encouraged to pursue his graduate course of study.” Although we will never know what Hall’s *Piers Plowman* might have looked like, we can nevertheless chart a future for *Piers Plowman* studies that, in keeping with recent and important work on premodern race, recognizes how race and racism inform Langland’s poem and have steered the trajectory of its scholarship. We thus welcome proposals that think, in the broadest terms, about questions of race in *Piers Plowman*, in its sources and related works, and in its reception. Possible topics include but are not limited to: (the absence of) race in *Piers Plowman* studies; the racialization of non-Christians and peasants; conversion, race, and empire; the rhetoric of whiteness; pedagogy and white supremacy; race and personification.

11. Langland’s Ecological Imagination

Organizer: Bernardo S. Hinojosa, St. Norbert College (bds.hinojosa@gmail.com)

In recent decades, scholars have increasingly sought to recover the ecological thought of the Middle Ages, its ethical valences, and its literary and artistic representations. Premodern ecological thought may offer, on one hand, an alternative to the practices of dominion and control that guide human interactions with the environment in modernity. Yet, on the other hand, it is perhaps in the Middle Ages that we find the roots for our current environmental crises. This panel invites ecocritical approaches to Langland’s *Piers Plowman* and related works. We welcome proposals that recover the poem’s ecological thought: what kind of interactions do Langland, his contemporaries, and his successors imagine between humans, nonhumans, and the broader material world? In the spirit of “*Piers Plowman* Today,” we also welcome proposals that consider whether and how premodern ecological thought can speak to present-day environmental catastrophe. Possible topics include but are not limited to: agricultural labor and extraction capitalism; weather and climate change; elemental ecocriticism; representations of plants, animals, and minerals; race, empire, and ecology; queer ecology; medieval and modern apocalypticism; theology and the natural world; ecology and poetic form.

12. Devotional and Contemplative Writing

Organizers: Rebecca Davis, University of California, Irvine (radavis@uci.edu) and Nicolette Zeeman, University of Cambridge (nz202@cam.ac.uk)

We seek new work in devotional and contemplative prose or poetry, Latin or vernacular, with or without a direct link to *Piers Plowman*. We welcome papers on the iconic devotional and contemplative writers of the later Middle Ages – Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, the *Cloud* author, Margery Kempe – but also the many other anonymous, continental or translated works circulating in England in this period. We are interested (among other things) in current research on Richard Rolle and his tradition; the overlaps between contemplative thought and pastoralia; the relationship between devotional writing and heterodoxy; the many different forms and discursive modes of writing about religious experience. We also note that *Piers Plowman* can itself be read as a devotional or even contemplative text.

13. Sermons, Pastoralia and Pedagogy

Organizers: Alastair Bennett, Royal Holloway, University of London (Alastair.Bennett@rhul.ac.uk) and Nicolette Zeeman, University of Cambridge (nz202@cam.ac.uk)

Studies in the many forms and performative modes of medieval teaching continue to be active and diverse. This is an opportunity to share new research on the discourses – and literature – of instruction, whether moral and pastoral, or pedagogic and educational. For this session we seek new research on: preaching, lay catechism and confession; drama, performance and orality; the medieval schoolroom, but also teaching performed outside the schoolroom; the forms of instruction, whether monologic or dialogic, closed or open-ended, explicit and preceptive, or figured and imaginative. The discourses of sermon, pastoralia and pedagogy are of course central to *Piers Plowman*; we also welcome papers that engage with the poem from this perspective.

14. Langland's New Materialisms

Organizer: Tekla Bude, Oregon State University (budet@oregonstate.edu)

The constellation of critical methodologies loosely collated under the umbrella of New Materialisms (object-oriented ontology, posthumanism, speculative realism, actor-network theory, animacy studies, etc) take seriously the effective and affective capacities of the material world on human subjects and their cultural products. This panel welcomes papers on the agency of matter in *Piers Plowman* and related texts. How does matter make personification? How do animacy hierarchies determine *Piers Plowman's* ethics? Is alliteration a form of “vibrant matter”? Paper proposals considering agential matter and the production of any one of the genres or forms (personification allegory, sermon, school-text, mysticism, alliterative verse, narrative poem) contained in Langland's text or the texts with which it is in conversation are welcomed.

15. Langland and Mental Health

Organizer: Richard H. Godden, Louisiana State University (rgodden1@lsu.edu)

William Langland's *Piers Plowman* is, among many other things, a dialogue with the Self, facilitated through the machinery of medieval allegory. This panel will explore representations of mental health in the 14th century, especially in *Piers Plowman* or related texts. Langland not only reveals an ambivalent and multifaceted attitude toward disabled figures in the poem, but he also explores the mental state of Will, whose search for Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest often leaves the Dreamer in states of agitation, perplexity, and distress. How are nonnormative minds represented in *Piers Plowman* or related literary traditions? How do medieval genres like the dream vision or allegory provide a space to explore or interrogate mental health? How do representations of mental health intersect with spiritual health? Or salvation? We invite varied approaches to the subject of mental health in the 14th century, including but not limited to Disability Studies and the history of medicine. In the spirit of “*Piers Plowman* Today,” we also welcome proposals that consider how premodern representations of mental health can speak to the present-day. Possible topics include but are not limited to: mental health and education; mental health and aging; neurodiversity; institutions of care; and recovery.

16. *Piers Plowman's* Soundscapes

Organizer: Tekla Bude, Oregon State University (budet@oregonstate.edu)

Piers Plowman is a sonorous text. Not only are its personifications built out of their spoken words, but music (some liturgical, some secular) dots the pages of the text, and some figures are downright

noisy. Its landscape, too, is one that resonates as Will walks through it. Nevertheless, it is also, simultaneously, a deeply *textual* literary project. How is sonic experience present in, and made central to, *Piers Plowman*'s formal, aesthetic, or ethical project in spite of, and in concert with, its literary qualities? What do medieval theories of sound and music have to say about the text? What might modern work in sound studies bring to a reading of *Piers*? This panel is interested in musical experience as well as other forms of "organized sound," but also welcomes papers on the aural qualities and pedagogies of the poem more generally.

17. Queering *Piers Plowman*

Organizer: Jamie Taylor, Bryn Mawr College (jktaylor@brynmawr.edu)

This session invites participants to (re)assess how *Piers Plowman* thinks about gender and sexuality. Holly Crocker suggests that inquiries into *Piers* and gender have highlighted women's dispossession and erasure, but that they may also have unintentionally reinforced the centrality of elite masculinity in the poem. How might we think anew about gender in *Piers Plowman*? How does queer theory or trans studies help us read *Piers*, and how might *Piers* help us shape those fields' questions and vocabularies? What does the future of thinking about gender, sexuality, and *Piers* look like? How might we think about Langlandian gender alongside, for example, Chaucerian gender or gender in other late medieval alliterative poetry? Possible topics may include gender and poetic form; gender and sexuality; trans studies; affect and gender; ecofeminism; gender and theology; gender and race; embodiment.

18. *Piers Plowman* and Theology Today

Organizer: Curtis Gruenler, Hope College (gruenler@hope.edu) and Ellen K. Rentz, Claremont McKenna College (erentz@cmc.edu)

The endlessly resourceful language of *Piers Plowman* continues to invite attention to its theological implications, both traditional and innovative, alongside other theological voices of its own time as well as voices more ancient and more recent. This session is open to all theological topics in Langland and his contemporaries. In light of the conference theme, we especially invite attention to how *Piers Plowman* and its contemporaries can open up new perspectives on patristic and medieval theology and/or how *Piers Plowman* can contribute to current theological conversations, as David Aers in particular has advocated. Some topics ripe for consideration might include: theological language, both vernacular and Latin; atonement theology, especially alternatives to the dominant modern theory of penal substitution; universal salvation, perhaps in light of recent work by David Bentley Hart and others; theological anthropology and ecclesiology; ecotheology; the metaphysics of participation and the relation between natural and supernatural, perhaps in light of work by Andrew Davison and, again, David Bentley Hart.

19. Langlandian Temporalities

Organizer: Rebecca Davis, University of California, Irvine (radavis@uci.edu) and Richard H. Godden, Louisiana State University (rgodden1@lsu.edu)

In thinking about *Piers Plowman* "today," this session invites papers that examine Langland's representation of time. Possible topics include biblical and historical frameworks, natural processes of growth and decline, the daily and seasonal rhythms of church time, the measures of merchant's

time, apocalypticism and the end times, or the ways that these (and other) temporal forms come into contact in the poem. The multiple and asynchronous forms of temporality in *Piers Plowman*, some seemingly local, some arching across the poem, along with its stop-start quality, the product of what D. Vance Smith calls “an *inceptive* animus,” suggest that Langland has several ways of thinking about and using temporality. Anne Middleton's notion of “episodicity” has been very influential in *Piers Plowman* studies; but might what Carolyn Dinshaw calls the “queerness of time” also cast light on the poem? What other kinds of theorization might be relevant here? In what ways does the alliterative line address or otherwise shape our perception of time’s passage in the poem? How does Langland’s handling of time compare to that of his contemporaries and/or his intellectual and literary contexts?

20. How to Teach *Piers Plowman*

Organizer: Ellen K. Rentz, Claremont McKenna College (erentz@cmc.edu)

This roundtable session invites contributions centered on contemporary pedagogical theory and practice: how do you teach this poem, and what does it mean to teach it today? Topics might include: *Piers Plowman* and contemporary approaches to teaching and learning; canons and anthologies; decolonizing the Middle English syllabus; *Piers Plowman* and the world around us; Middle English and multilingual learners; tried and true written assignments, collaborative projects, and/or in-class exercises; engaging with manuscripts in the classroom; “soul hele” and trauma-informed teaching.