



Radical Pastoral, 13811594

Mike Rodman Jones

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From William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, through the highly polemicized literary culture of fifteenth-century Lollardy, to major Reformation writers such as Simon Fish, William Tyndale and John Bale, and into the 1590s, this book argues for a vital reassessment of our understanding of the literary and cultural modes of the Reformation. It argues that the ostensibly revolutionary character of early Protestant literary culture was deeply indebted to medieval satirical writing and, indeed, can be viewed as a remarkable crystallization of the textual movements and polemical personae of a rich, combative tradition of medieval writing which is still at play on the London stage in the age of Marlowe and Shakespeare. Beginning with a detailed analysis of *Piers Plowman*, this book traces the continued vivacity of combative satirical personae and self-fashionings that took place in an appropriative movement centred on the figure of the medieval labourer. The remarkable era of Protestant 'plowman polemics' has too often been dismissed as conventional or ephemeral writing too stylistically separate to be linked to *Piers Plowman*, or held under the purview of historians who have viewed such texts as sources of theological or documentary information, rather than as vital literary-cultural works in their own right. *Radical Pastoral, 1381-1594* makes a vigorous case for the existence of a highly politicised tradition of 'polemical pastoral' which stretched across the whole of the sixteenth century, a tradition that has been largely marginalised by both medievalists and early modernists.

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