ABSTRACT

JAMES ERIC ENSLEY. FRAGMENTARY PEIERS PLOWMAN: A DESCRIPTION, DIGITAL EDITION, & LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE POEM’S EXTANT FRAGMENTS. (Under the direction of Professor Timothy Stinson.)

This project takes as its topic the three extant fragments of Piers Plowman: Yale University Osborn fa45 (The Holloway Fragment), Cambridge Pembroke College fragment MS 312 C/6, and Cambridge Gonville & Caius College MS 669/646 (f. 210). Fragments have only in the past decade become of major interest to medieval textual scholars and literary critics, which has left these three manuscripts relatively unexamined as compared to the other complete manuscripts of the Piers tradition. There are three main goals for this project: the first is to provide an XML transcription for the three fragments, as no digital transcription has been published for them; using TEI standards, this project offers a digital documentary edition of each fragment. The second is to provide detailed codicological and textual descriptions for each of the fragments, which entails gathering the extant research on each of the items; where possible the author has examined the archival notes for each MS and, as in the case of Osborn fa. 45, the fragment itself. Finally, using the previous transcriptions and descriptions, this project approaches the symbolic and aesthetic import of fragmentation for the text of Piers Plowman and provides a discussion for why compilations containing the poem and fragments of it are relatively uncommon in comparison to other medieval texts. Ultimately, this project complicates the term “fragment” when applied to medieval works and asks readers to consider the import of material dismemberment on a work that has an aesthetic based on attempting to incorporate fragments into one’s ongoing existence.