

Karine Moreau-Guibert † (ed). *Pore Caitif. A Middle English Manual of Religion and Devotion*. Textes Vernaculaires du Moyen Age. Turnhout: Brepols, 2019. Pp. 293. € 85. ISBN 978-2-503-58293-1.

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This posthumously published volume contains the first critical edition of the popular Middle English devotional text *The Pore Caitif*. The only edition of this text that existed so far was sister Mary Teresa Brady's unpublished PhD thesis (Fordham University, 1954). This has no doubt contributed to the fact that the *Pore Caitif*, a text that according to Karine Moreau-Guibert's updated list (13-5) is extant in no less than 57 complete or partial manuscript copies, has received relatively little attention. With this long anticipated edition, Moreau-Guibert has made this important Middle English text available to a much wider group of researchers and students of late medieval religious cultures.

After a preface that was written on the basis of the notes that Moreau-Guibert left just before her death on 23 September 2017 (9-10), the book opens with a general introduction about the broad historical context and the manuscripts of the *Pore Caitif*. Moreau-Guibert has subdivided her manuscript list into three main groups: thirty 'full texts' (group A), twenty 'incomplete texts' (group B), and a more diffuse group of four so-called 'souvenir copies' (group C), subclassified as two 'fragmentary texts' and two 'annotators' copies' (43). This list already illustrates the complex nature of the *Pore Caitif*'s manuscripts' transmission. Many manuscripts do not contain the text in its fullest form, and even within the group of full texts, Moreau-Guibert identifies seven 'interpolated copies' and two 'erratic full texts' (16). In addition to this, 'Lollard interpolations' of some of the *Pore Caitif* manuscripts, earlier discussed by Mary Teresa Brady (1989), Nicole Rice (2013 and 2021) and Kalpen Trivendi (2011), are systematically listed in the general introduction. Moreau-Guibert notes that 'the heterodox nature of these copies is strictly limited to the passages affected by the interpolations' (32) and, therefore, inextricably linked to complex processes of textual transmission.

In the next section of the introduction, entitled 'The Transmission of the Text', Moreau-Guibert states that her edition 'seeks to offer the closest possible rendering of the original text as devised by its author' (56). This seems somewhat contradictory with what she writes about this same 'author' earlier in the introduction: 'I have called him the maker and not the author of the text, because he himself clearly expressed that this was his role (...) thus

paying credit to the real ‘authors’ of the text while defining it as a compilation’ (26). Indeed, the *Pore Caitif* is made up of different source texts, including selections of Richard Rolle’s *Emendatio Vitae* and his *Form of Living* in the later tracts of the text. The first part of the *Pore Caitif*, on the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Our Father, is composed of commonplace material. While Moreau-Guibert acknowledges that the *Pore Caitif* is a text defined by its maker – or indeed ‘compiler’ – as a compilation in the general introduction of the text, she seems to let go of this idea completely in the ‘Transmission of the Text’ section of this edition, where it becomes an ‘original text’ by an ‘author’ with one (lost) archetype (77). This somewhat obscures the view of the *Pore Caitif* as a compilation made up of other source texts, going through a series of ‘successive transformations’ (40) in its manuscript transmission, though it recognizes compiling as an authorial activity.

The next sections of the edition contain elaborate and detailed comparisons of the different *Pore Caitif* manuscripts. The textual collations, variant readings, and stemma of the manuscripts will be highly useful to anyone interested in *Pore Caitif*’s manuscript transmission and variation. Moreau-Guibert poses the interesting hypothesis that some of the manuscripts’ variations were caused by copyists who started copying by quire instead of using the full manuscript (87). Towards the end of the introduction, Moreau-Guibert convincingly argues why she has based her edition on the fourteenth-century manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Anglais 41, a manuscript classified by her as a ‘standard full text’ from group A (15-6). In addition to this, she has added variant readings of three other manuscripts to her *Pore Caitif* edition, including London, British Library, MS Harley 2336: the base text of Brady’s unpublished *Pore Caitif* edition (101). She has also used a fifteenth-century manuscript with Lollard interpolations, Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.14.53, for her critical apparatus. This allows for interesting comparisons with the earlier work of Mary Teresa Brady, and it illustrates textual variations from the fourteenth- to the fifteenth- centuries and between two copies that have traditionally been classified as ‘orthodox’ versus ‘heterodox’.

Moreau-Guibert’s strong focus on the *Pore Caitif* manuscripts has resulted in a concise and detailed edition of this text with great awareness of the text’s complex manuscript transmission. However, the introduction and the edition do not discuss the text itself in much detail. It would have been helpful to have been able to find out Moreau-Guibert’s thoughts on where and how the *Pore Caitif* develops from its catechetical first part to its more allegorical and contemplative second part. Or, for instance, where and how the *Pore Caitif* borrows from Richard Rolle’s works – which form the basis of the *Pore Caitif*’s contemplative programme

– or how the text of the *Pore Caitif* resonates with more general textual themes and metaphors such as the Name of Jesus or the Charter of Christ. Had Moreau-Guibert been given the time, she might have included the discussion of these important aspects of the text. Despite this, this *Pore Caitif* edition is a welcome step forward and will hopefully form the basis of further research to this fascinating Middle English text.