

BART BESAMUSCA

The Distribution of *Arthurian Literature*

A Note to Hermina Joldersma's 'Worth the Trouble?'

(TNTL 125 (2009), 155-160)

In the special issue of *TNTL* on the relationship of the study of Dutch language and literature with the international academic community, published on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of this journal in 2009, Hermina Joldersma discusses English-language scholarship on Middle Dutch literature (pp. 155-160). As indicated by the question mark that figures in the essay's title, Joldersma doubts whether it is worth the effort that Dutch-speaking scholars write in English. In her view, little attention is paid to their work by their international colleagues. Joldersma suggests that in order to distribute their scholarly work more successfully, Dutch-speaking researchers should have their contributions in English published by university presses only, rather than non-university presses. One of the arguments she puts forward to support her point of view, to which I will return in a minute, concerns the *Arthurian Literature* series, published by Boydell & Brewer (Cambridge), an academic publisher specializing in medieval studies. Much to her own surprise, her investigations led her to conclude that the distribution of *Arthurian Literature* is very small. 'Intuitively,' so she writes, 'one would assume that the "invisible college" for Arthurian studies is large and international, and the series a prestigious one acquired by many libraries' (p. 156).

Joldersma admits that faulty research methods may have influenced her findings with regard to the *Arthurian Literature* series (p. 156). Regrettably, I have to confirm that this is indeed the case. It is easy to explain why she spent more effort searching two *Arthurian Literature* volumes than any of the other publications which make up her corpus (as she remarks on p. 156): she has misunderstood the nature of *Arthurian Literature*, which is classified as a journal/serial volume (as it is published annually) rather than as a monograph. Joldersma's Appendix 1, the list of researched works (p. 158), makes her mistake quite clear. There we find under numbers 1 and 3 the volumes 24 (2007) and 17 (1999) of *Arthurian Literature* described incorrectly. Joldersma mentions volume editors (vol. 24: Besamusca, Brandsma, Busby; vol. 17: Busby, Besamusca, Kooper) and titles (vol. 24: 'The European Dimensions of Arthurian Literature'; vol. 17: 'Originality and Tradition in the Middle Dutch *Roman van Walewein*'), but she erroneously cites subtitles instead of the main title. To make it clear: she has been searching for monographs, where she should have looked for the journal/yearbook *Arthurian Literature*.

Caroline Palmer, Editorial Director at Boydell & Brewer, has informed me that contrary to what Joldersma's findings suggest, *Arthurian Literature* is sold widely to institutions (and indeed individuals) throughout the world. Standing orders for the yearbook are held by university libraries worldwide, from London to Melbourne to Nijmegen to Cornell. It is, moreover, not true that *Arthurian Literature* 17 and 24 are not held in Cambridge and Oxford university libraries, as Boydell & Brewer are obliged to send them copies under the terms of UK copyright.

In addition, I would like to mention that a complete collection is held by Yale and Princeton, among other libraries. And contrary to Joldersma's claim, Harvard does hold a copy of volume 24 of *Arthurian Literature*. I deem it important that this misapprehension as to the influence and distribution of *Arthurian Literature*, the most important journal in Arthurian studies, should be corrected.

Joldersma presents the supposedly small distribution of *Arthurian Literature* as an argument in favor of her view that Dutch-speaking scholars will reach a broader audience when their work is published by a university press. However, I have shown that her argument is seriously flawed. In addition, I must also point out that sales do not equate readers. One library purchase of a book will be read by many people, of course. Moreover, I should stress that Joldersma's essay perpetuates the misguided notion, particularly prevalent in North America, that a university press is automatically 'better' than a non-university press. It is good to know that many of the non-university presses, like Boydell & Brewer, are highly prestigious academic firms with a strong reputation for scholarship. They have exactly the same standards and procedures as a university press, and insist on rigorous peer review. Their books are carefully copyedited and produced to the highest possible quality. We should know better than to assume that the presence of the words 'university press' automatically guarantees better quality than the list of a non-university press.

Address of the author

Department of Dutch
Utrecht University
Trans 10
NL-3512 JK Utrecht
a.a.m.besamusca@uu.nl