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The Broadcaster's Catacombs: Looking for Literature in a Dutch Listings Magazine (*De radiogids*, 1929–1941)¹

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ABSTRACT

As soon as radio became a mass medium in the 1920s and 1930s, broadcasting organizations aired programmes on literary topics. This article explores the function of literature in *De radiogids*, the weekly periodical of the Dutch socialist broadcaster VARA. Focusing on the pre-war period, the article shows that literary radio programmes received little attention in *De radiogids*, despite the efforts of literary programme maker Martien Beversluis to establish a literary feature in the magazine. Although these findings suggest that literary radio programmes were of little interest to the VARA, *De radiogids* contains valuable cultural-historical sources concerning the relationship between radio and literature in the interwar period.

KEYWORDS

Dutch literature, radio, listings magazines, pillarization, broadcasting history

1 This article originally appeared in Dutch as 'In de catacomben van de omroep: Aandacht voor literatuur in *De radiogids* (VARA, 1929–1941)', *TS: Tijdschrift voor tijdschriftstudies*, no. 33 (2013), 19–36, and was translated and slightly revised by the author. All in-text translations are also by the author.

On 28 October 1931, Rudolf Kuyper delivered a speech for the socialist broadcasting organization in the Netherlands, VARA (Vereeniging van Arbeiders-Radio-Amateurs; Association of Labourers-Radio-Amateurs, founded in 1925). In this speech, Kuyper advocated the use of radio as a means of cultural mediation. In his role as the Chairman of the 'committee for the radio-lectures of VARA and the Institute for Labourers' Advancement', in which he worked together with Gerrit Zwertbroek and Piet Voogd, Kuyper acknowledged the widespread objection to radio, claiming that this new medium posed dangers to the realm of culture.² The biggest threat was mechanical reproduction: 'real' culture was reserved for institutions like the concert hall, while critics believed that radio mutilated pieces by celebrated musicians through the rustling sounds of the radio apparatus.³ Kuyper explained this problem to his audience by using a food metaphor in which he compared theatre visits to eating fresh vegetables and listening to a radio play to consuming canned food.

In spite of the loss of vitamins, however, Kuyper claimed that broadcasting associations still had a vital role in cultural mediation: 'For having canned food is still better than malnutrition, and like film, radio is capable of giving the masses access to the very best artists, who otherwise would only perform for a small, solvent audience'.⁴ Judging from VARA's radio programmes, Kuyper's committee considered literature to be a part of their auditors' diet. Since the broadcasting regulations of 15 May 1930, which prescribed that radio professionals should broadcast content that was 'diverting, instructive, political, aesthetic, ethical and/or religious',⁵ literary radio programmes occupied a position of structural importance in VARA's broadcasting schedule.

This was also the case for the other players in the Dutch broadcasting system. Like VARA, the neutral AVRO, the Catholic KRO, and the Protestant NCRV paid regular attention to literature — more or less on a weekly basis. On the one hand, broadcasting associations brought their members in direct contact with primary literary texts; for example, through declamations of poetry and prose or through radio adaptations of novels.⁶ On the other hand, radio functioned as a medium for the secondary production of literature: it broadcast lectures on canonical texts and key movements in literary history, but speakers also sketched trends in contemporary literature or reviewed new publications in a programme billed as a 'half hour on books'.⁷ The vast majority of these programmes were produced by writers who had a firm literary reputation of their own. In the case of VARA, for example, the socialist poet Beversluis (1894–1966) gave radio declamations, while the best-selling novelist A. M. De Jong (1888–1943) ran a recurrent literary feature.⁸

Literary historians in the field of Dutch literature have hitherto paid little attention to the radio activities of authors such as Beversluis and De Jong. For many years, only the leading critic of AVRO, Dr P. H. Ritter Jr, had been a subject of research,

2 Rudolf Kuyper, 'Ontwerp radio-voordracht over het werk der commissie voor de radio-voordracht van de V.A.R.A. en het Instituut voor Arbeidersontwikkeling', VARA (28 October 1931). The typescript of this lecture is located in part 249 of archive 2.27.05 of the ROCC (Radio Omroep Controle Commissie) in the Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

3 Compare Bert Hogenkamp, Sonja De Leeuw, and Huub Wijffes, eds, *Een eeuw van beeld en geluid: Cultuurgeschiedenis van radio en televisie in Nederland* (Hilversum: Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid, 2012), p. 46.

4 'Want conservenvoeding is toch altijd beter dan ondervoeding en met de radio kan men, evenals door de film, de allerbeste krachten, die anders slechts voor een klein betaalkrchtig publiek zouden kunnen optreden, onder het bereik van de massa brengen.' Kuyper, 'Ontwerp-radiovoordracht'.

5 Hogenkamp and others, p. 64.

6 More information on Dutch radio plays is provided in Catharina Bulte, *Het Nederlandse hoorspel: Aspecten van de bepaling van een tekstsoort* (Utrecht: H&S, 1984).

7 In Dutch: 'boekenhalfuurtje'.

8 Compare Jeroen Dera, 'k Heb nog lang geen vijanden genoeg! A. M. de Jong als radiocriticus bij de VARA', *Zacht lawijd*, 12.2 (2013), 26–49.

mostly because his former colleague Jan J. Van Herpen both organized Ritter's archives and published edited volumes of several of his correspondences.⁹ Until very recently, however, there was no survey study that systematically analyzed the literary programmes of Dutch broadcasting associations before the Second World War.¹⁰

An important reason for this historical gap is the relative absence of useable sources. Only in rare cases have manuscripts or typescripts of literary radio talks been preserved, and even then, such unpublished material is hidden away uncategorised in various archives.¹¹ Nevertheless, many relevant sources that actually *are* available in print have until now remained largely unexplored. Especially the broadcasters' listings magazines, that were primarily intended to inform members of a broadcasting association about the broadcasting schedule of the upcoming week, contain valuable information about the presence of literature in the ether between the wars. They make clear, for instance, who actually spoke in the literary features and which topics were addressed.

This article focuses on the listings magazine of VARA: *De radiogids: Officieel orgaan van de Vereeniging van Arbeiders-Radio-Amateurs* (*The Radioguide: Official Organ of the Association of Labourers-Radio-Amateurs*). The magazine was published under this name for the first time on 25 January 1930. Before that date, from May 1926 onwards, the journal was titled *Radio*. It was published on an irregular basis until the end of 1926, when it started to appear weekly. VARA members who subscribed to the listings magazine — in 1928 at a cost of 16 cents per week — received the journal via the canvasser of De Arbeiderspers, the leading Dutch socialist publisher of the time.¹² *Radio* and *De radiogids* contained the broadcasting schedules of the different Dutch radio broadcasters, preceded by a general section that discussed technical, societal, and financial topics related to radio. Moreover, the magazines published information about the content of noteworthy programmes, so that listeners knew what to expect when they turned on their radios.

In what follows, I will mainly address this discourse surrounding the broadcasting schedules of VARA's pre-Second World War listings magazines. Was this space used to reflect on literature, and if so, in what way? This question is not only relevant with regard to Kuiper's ideal of cultural mediation, but also because the answer could shed light on the contemporary reception of literary radio programmes. We know for a fact that the radio book reviews of De Jong went largely unnoticed by major newspapers and literary magazines,¹³ but it has yet to be explored whether literary radio programmes caught the interest of print media that had emerged in the wake of the growing field of radio.

9 Jan J. Van Herpen, *Al wat in boeken steekt: Dertig jaar radiowerk van dr. P. H. Ritter jr. bij de AVRO* (Zutphen: Terra, 1982). A more recent study on Ritter is Merijn De Boer, "Onzichtbaere toehouders!": Dr. P. H. Ritter jr. en zijn samenwerking met uitgevers', *De parelduiker*, 15.3 (2010), 25–42. Ritter's activities as a cultural mediator are also the subject of the PhD research Alex Rutten is carrying out at the Open Universiteit in the Netherlands.

10 This changed with the publication of my monograph: Jeroen Dera, *Sprekend kritiek: Literatuurprogramma's in de vroege jaren van de Nederlandse radio en televisie* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2017). An earlier contribution is Koen Rymenants and Pieter Verstraeten, 'Europese literatuur voor luisteraars verklaard', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde (TNTL)*, 125.1 (2009), 55–80.

11 Radio talks by A. M. De Jong, for instance, are available in the ROCC archive in The Hague, while several lectures of the protestant critic Cees Rijnsdorp (NCRV) can be found in his personal archive, which is located in the Historisch Documentatiecentrum voor het Nederlands Protestantisme (1800–present) in Amsterdam.

12 Compare Huub Wijffes, *VARA: Biografie van een omroep* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2009), p. 54.

13 Dera, "k Heb nog lang geen vijanden genoeg!", p. 45.



Fig. 1 Cover of *De radiogids* (12 July 1930)

VARA, *De radiogids*, and their Attention to Literature

When *Radio* changed its name to *De radiogids* in 1930, VARA was flourishing. Levinus van Looi and Zwertbroek had founded the association on 1 November 1925, though it took some time until it became a success. On 1 January 1928, it had a mere 4,105 members. That can be compared with the socialist newspaper *Het Volk* which had 72,045 subscribers at this time.¹⁴ In the early days, the association especially attracted technically-minded members, with the skills to build their own radio sets (so-called radio amateurs). The result was financial difficulties due to low income from membership fees. Until late 1928 the number of *Radio* readers was so limited that the magazine sustained financial loss.¹⁵

1929, however, brought a turnaround for VARA. Its membership increased dramatically, which had, of course, positive effects on the subscriber base of *Radio*. VARA had 27,000 members on 1 January 1929 (already a sevenfold increase compared to 1928), and by early 1930 the number had risen to 67,674, passing the mark of 100,000 in that same year. Fig. 1 makes this trend visible:

There are several explanations for this growing popularity of VARA. On the one hand, there are external factors that contributed to its success: innovations by the technology company Philips led to radio's breakthrough as a mass medium, while the broadcasting companies received plenty of media coverage because they were fighting a fierce struggle over the allotment of air time. On the other hand, the growing number of listeners was a result of internal developments within VARA: a conscious shift

¹⁴ Wijffes, *VARA*, p. 56.

¹⁵ Wijffes, *VARA*, p. 41.

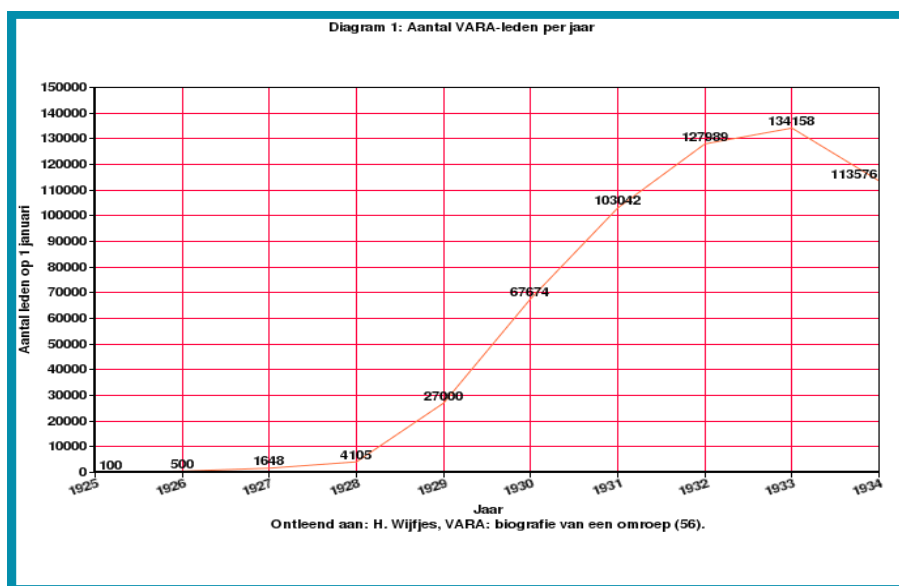


Fig. 2 Number of VARA members per year. Vertical axis: number of members on 1 January¹⁶

towards more audience-friendly programmes that also appealed to citizens outside the socialist sphere.¹⁷

Within this audience-friendly programming style, VARA laid special emphasis on radio shows for children and on popular music. In early 1929, the broadcaster hired the successful conductor Hugo de Groot and his complete orchestra, winning the hearts of thousands of listeners. Literature, however, was of less interest to the working-class people who were still VARA's target audience. In a 1936 survey by Blonk and Kruijt, 36 percent of the questioned labourers answered that they did not read at all, while 64 percent of them preferred hearing radio music over listening to speeches and declamations — the latter was, of course, the core business of literary radio programmes.¹⁸ De Jong, who presented himself as a militant opponent of the ever-growing rift between literary writers and the working class,¹⁹ clearly had some serious work to do.

Already a preliminary reading of the interwar volumes of *Radio* and *De radiogids*, however, shows that VARA did not primarily use its listings magazine to culturally elevate its subscribers. Especially in its early years, the broadcaster's journal rather functioned as a frontline in the heated debates between VARA and ANRO (from 1928 known as AVRO) concerning the allotment of airtime. Inspired by the model of the British BBC, ANRO's ambition was to establish a national broadcasting house. Obviously, this mission thwarted the plans of the other broadcasting associations, of which VARA was ANRO's main opponent, mostly because its socialist ideology conflicted with the liberal political views of many ANRO members. In *Radio*, VARA's fight against ANRO was, for instance, visible in Zwertbroek's feature 'Vogt-igheden', which contained highly critical texts about ANRO director Willem Vogt.²⁰ The quarrel

16 Wijfjes, *VARA*, p. 56.

17 These developments are documented in Wijfjes, *VARA*, pp. 51–65.

18 A. Blonk and Jakob Pieter Kruijt, *De besteding van de vrije tijd door de Nederlandse arbeiders: Uitkomsten van een enquête onder 621 arbeiders* (Amsterdam: Nutsboeken, 1936), p. 40.

19 Compare A. M. De Jong, *De arbeider en het boek* (Amsterdam: De Ontwikkeling, 1927).

20 In Dutch, the name 'Vogt' sounds the same as the substantive 'vocht', which means 'moisture'. The

also manifested itself through direct responses to texts from the ANRO camp, that were in turn published in the rivalling listings magazine *De Radiobode* (*The Radio Messenger*). On 18 February 1928, for example, C. P. Van Rossum venomously reacted to Vogt's plea for an ideologically 'neutral' broadcasting system:

Lectures on intellectual and societal themes cannot be neutral. Thus, a truly neutral broadcaster is not authorized nor competent to perform such *non-neutral* lectures. [...] It is because of these considerations that the non-neutral broadcasters have come into existence, and we are fully convinced of the cultural value of these broadcasters, whereas the neutral broadcaster is doomed to rely on amusement.²¹

Still, the tensions between the different broadcasting associations and the underlying political oppositions did not result in preaching to the choir. From time to time, *Radio* contained announcements of programmes that were produced by competing broadcasters — as long as they were of clear value to a working-class audience, that is. In the case of literary programmes, for instance, *Radio* highlighted the quadripartite lecture series 'Religie en Poëzie' ('Religion and Poetry') that Beversluis performed for the Liberal Christian broadcaster VPRO in 1928.²² From VARA's perspective, sharing this information was probably relevant not because of the subjects Beversluis addressed; rather, Beversluis would be an interesting speaker because of his reputation as a socialist poet who was the 'cultural-political mainstay' of the SDAP (Social Democratic Labourers Party) in general, and *Radio* editor Zwertbroek in particular.²³ This interpretation is enforced by a full-page advertisement in the listings magazine issue of 25 August 1928, which again draws attention to a VPRO programme starring Beversluis (Fig. 3). In this advertisement, the *creators* of 'Moderne Dichtkunst' ('Modern poetry') are at the centre of attention. First, Beversluis's name is explicitly connected to the name of the programme, while no single clue is given about its contents; instead, readers had to turn to the programming section to find out that 'Moderne Dichtkunst' contained declamations of poetry, rather than a radio lecture with musical intermezzi. Second, the pictures of Beversluis and Schouwman are the eye-catchers of the advertisement, leaving relatively little space for the images of the poets covered in the show. Hence, this advertisement appears to be more focused on Beversluis than on the poetry he recited.

His contacts with Zwertbroek explain why Beversluis regularly contributed to *Radio* from July 1929 onwards. In doing so, he was the first literary author to join the ranks of the listings magazine. A little more than a year later, after VARA had gained considerable airtime through the broadcasting regulations instituted by the government minister Paul Reymer, Beversluis became a permanent employee of the association,²⁴ with responsibility for, amongst other things, the feature 'Internationale socialistische poëzie' ('International socialist poetry'). VARA also contracted De Jong, not only famous

name of the feature, 'Vogt-igheden', thus satirically refers to the derivative 'vochtigheden': 'moistures'.

- 21 'Lezingen op geestelijk gebied en maatschappelijk terrein kunnen niet neutraal zijn. Een waarlijk neutrale omroep is daarom niet bevoegd en evenmin competent deze *niet-neutrale* lezingen te geven. [...] Uit die overwegingen zijn de niet-neutrale omroepen ontstaan, en wij zijn ook vast overtuigd van de groote cultureele waarde van deze omroepen in tegenstelling met de neutrale, die gedoemd is aangewezen te blijven op amusement.' C. P. Van Rossum, 'De omroep als coupeur...', *Radio*, 2.18 (1928), 3–4.
- 22 'Martien Beversluis', *Radio*, 2.40 (1928), p. 53. Beversluis's lectures were published in print as *De religie in de poësie* (Huis ter Heide: De Tijdstroom, 1928).
- 23 The term 'cultural-political mainstay' (in Dutch: 'cultuurpolitieke steunpilaar') originates in Jaap Van de Merwe, *Het zwarte schaap van de rooie familie: Een biografie van Gerrit Jan Zwertbroek* (Amsterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 1989), p. 13.
- 24 Beversluis had been a temporary employee since 28 June 1929. Compare Gerrit Zwertbroek, 'Twee vaste aanstellingen: Een welkom aan Martien Beversluis en Eli Bomli', *De radiogids*, 4.42 (1930), p. 29.



Fig. 3 Advertisement for the VPRO programme 'Moderne Dichtkunst', *Radio*, 2.45 (1928), p. 14

for his novels about the village boy Merijntje Gijzen, but also the leading literary critic of the socialist newspaper *Het Volk*. On 23 July 1930, *Het Volk* reported positively on De Jong's appointment at VARA: 'Now that such a well-known author like De Jong enters into service, the labourers' broadcaster in general — regarding the artistic part of its work — and *De Radio-Gids* [sic] in particular will gain success. Hence, the enthusiasm of the many listeners is understandable'.²⁵

These words show that De Jong's contribution to *De radiogids* led to high expectations. In the next section of this article, I will delve into the contents of the listings magazine in order to examine the real influence of Beversluis's and De Jong's contracts with VARA on the presence of literature in *De radiogids*. I will focus on the years 1929–41: in 1929, Beversluis started to contribute to *Radio*, whereas 1941 marked the temporary end of the magazine because of the German occupation of the Netherlands. During the period under examination, De Jong worked for VARA until 1940, while Beversluis was suspended by the broadcaster in 1934. I will discuss this event in more detail later — first, I will present an inventory of the presence of literature in *De radiogids*.

25 'Waar ten slotte behalve de arbeidersomroep in het algemeen, wat het kunstzinnige gedeelte van zijn arbeid betreft, maar in het bijzonder ook "De Radio-Gids" door de indiensttreding van een zoo bekend literator als De Jong winnen zal, is de geestdrift der vele luisteraars alleszins te begrijpen.' A. M. de Jong bij de VARA in vasten en volledigen dienst', *Het Volk* (23 June 1930).

‘Literature on the radio’

The majority of the literature-related contributions in *Radio* were initiated by Beversluis. In August 1929, more than a month after being appointed by the broadcaster, the poet started the feature ‘De literatuur in de radio’ (‘Literature on the radio’) in *Radio*, giving an overview of the literary programmes the different broadcasters aired that week. At first sight, the feature was not intended to promote Beversluis’s own radio work, but to serve as a guide for the literary minded who were trying to find their way in the radio jungle. Though ‘De literatuur in de radio’ did not last long: Beversluis published his overviews between 3 and 31 August, after which the feature died in silence, with a final instalment on 14 December.

In spite of its short-lived existence, ‘De literatuur in de radio’ offers relevant information about Beversluis’s activities as a radio critic, for the feature certainly did not contain a dry enumeration of the literary programmes the radio broadcasters had to offer. Rather, Beversluis used his space in the listings magazine to take position against the programmes under consideration, as well as against the authors discussed by his colleagues. In the first appearance of his feature, for instance, Beversluis commented on the programmes that KRO (4 August 1929) and AVRO (6 August 1929) were about to devote to the poetry of Anthonie Donker. Beversluis commenced his piece with a critical evaluation of Donker’s work: ‘Anthonie Donker totally deserves this attention. His verses are simple, deep, and beautiful, they exhale the purity of real poetry and are averse to language excesses and affectation, symptoms from which most Dutch modern poetry is heavily suffering’.²⁶ Beversluis’s aversion to ‘language excesses and affectation’ was stemming directly from his socialist poetics that rejected the aesthetic individualism of the dominant Dutch poetry movement of the 1880s (‘De Beweging van Tachtig’: ‘The Movement of the Eighties’), seeking to recover a connection between literature and the masses. Donker’s poems suited this poetics well according to Beversluis: they were relatively uncomplicated (and, by implication, accessible to a large readership) and described human sufferings that were not ‘personal and local’, but exemplary of ‘a compassion that becomes universal’.²⁷ This characterization of Donker’s poetry served as overture to the core of Beversluis’s text which predicted the quality of the upcoming programmes of KRO (by Willem ten Berge) and AVRO (by Hendrik Marsman). Even without having heard the programmes, Beversluis criticises Marsman in particular: ‘I quiver with fear thinking [...] of the talk by Marsman, since this critic has shown that his view on poetry is extremely personal and limited’.²⁸ In line with his socialist poetics, Beversluis considered Marsman to be a by-product of the Movement of the Eighties, incapable of judging a literary work of art without applying his highly particular preferences for ‘language excesses and affectation’. Hence, Beversluis advised VARA members to expect more of Ten Berge’s talk, ‘since he probably will not divert the attention from Donker’s talents that much’.²⁹

26 ‘Anthonie Donker verdient de belangstelling ten volle. Zijn verzen zijn eenvoudig, diep en schoon, ze ademen de zuiverheid van het echte dichterschap en ze zijn wars van taal-excessen en aanstellerij, waaraan de meeste Hollandsche moderne poëzie zwaar ziek ligt.’ Martien Beversluis, ‘De literatuur in de radio’, *Radio*, 3.41 (1929), p. 13.

27 ‘persoonlijk en plaatselijk; ‘van ‘n deernis die universeel wordt’. Beversluis, ‘De literatuur in de radio’, *Radio*, 3.41 (1929), p. 13.

28 ‘Ik huiver [...] voor de bespreking van Marsman over hem daar deze criticus getoond heeft een wel uiterst persoonlijke en beperkte visie te hebben op de poëzie’. Beversluis, ‘De literatuur in de radio’, *Radio*, 3.41 (1929), p. 13.

29 ‘daar deze wellicht zichzelf niet teveel voor het talent van Donker zal schuiven’. Beversluis, ‘De literatuur in de radio’, *Radio*, 3.41 (1929), p. 13.

It was not only in this attack on Marsman's radio talk that Beversluis's used 'De literatuur en de radio' as a literary battleground. In the fourth instalment of the feature, the critic expanded the national broadcasting debate to literature more generally, arguing that the limited airtime available to VARA obstructed the literary development of the working class:

When it comes to literature, VARA can bring just a little, and it is only the fault of the radio council and the still lacking ministerial order [about the allotment of airtime], that we cannot bring a large part of the Dutch citizens their literature through the ether, using the format that other broadcasters have practiced for a long time already. [...] It is exactly the task of radio, alongside the work of other institutes in our movement, to make our people familiar with their culture, with those things the people have created themselves and the things they are still creating. We deeply regret that we have not yet had any opportunity to champion our own authors and authoresses. How unfortunate is it, that so many well-prepared plans, talks, lectures, declamations, etc. keep waiting on the mercy of a small group of people, who probably don't have the slightest understanding about what they are obstructing and impeding?³⁰

Beversluis assumes a metaposition to the new medium of radio here. His emphasis on 'our own authors and authoresses' suggests that, in his view, broadcasting associations primarily served the cultural elevation of citizens within their own social sphere, rather than that of listeners of the nation as a whole. In this respect, Beversluis used the Christian broadcasters as an example, as, for him, they managed to convey 'the beauty of their culture' to their audience.³¹ For instance, Beversluis praised VPRO, where he had himself recited several poems: 'This broadcaster did not only invite great writers to their microphone, but also organized excellent introductions and lectures'.³²

'Poets of the rebellion'

Although (or perhaps rather because) Beversluis could exploit the potential to be polemical in 'De literatuur in de radio', the feature did not survive very long. Things turned out a little better for the second feature Beversluis initiated, 'Dichters der opstandigheid' ('Poets of the rebellion'). It appeared for the first time on 15 February 1930, the day before VARA started to broadcast a similarly named radio programme that ran until the end of April and was then continued in November and December 1930. In 'Dichters der opstandigheid', Beversluis invited socialist poets to perform their work, while he provided a short introduction of his guests. In *De radiogids*, he explained the need for such a programme by denouncing the structural lack of socialist anthologies in a literary field where other classes published compilations of their poetic production:

30 'Het is slechts weinig wat de V.A.R.A. aan literatuur kan brengen en het is slechts te wijten aan den radioraad en het uitblijvend ministerieel besluit, dat een groot deel der Ned. Bevolking haar eigen literatuur niet door den aether kan gebracht worden, op de wijze als de andere omroepen dat sinds lang doen. [...] Het is juist de taak der radio, naast het werk van andere instituten in onze beweging, om ons volk vertrouwd te maken met zijn cultuur, met datgene wat het volk zelve schiep en nog schiept. Hoe kunnen wij het betreuren, dat wij tot nu toe onze eigen schrijvers en schrijfsters niet naar voren konden brengen. Hoe innig jammer is het, dat zoovele uitgewerkte plannen, causerieën, lezingen, voordrachten etc. wachten op het genadeteken van enkelen, die zelve wellicht geen flauw begrip hebben van wat zij tegenhouden en belemmeren.' Martien Beversluis, 'De literatuur in de radio', *Radio*, 3.44 (1929), p. 13.

31 'de schoonheid hunner cultuur'. Beversluis, 'De literatuur in de radio', *Radio*, 3.41 (1929), p. 13.

32 'Zij bracht niet alleen goede schrijvers voor de microfoon, maar ze gaf uitstekende inleidingen en lezingen.' Beversluis, 'De literatuur in de radio', *Radio*, 3.41 (1929), p. 13.

As many of us know, such an anthology of bourgeois poetry — named ‘Erts’ [‘Ore’] — has appeared for some years now. Some recent issues of the Roman Catholic magazine [‘De’] Gemeenschap’ [‘The Community’], too, function as anthologies collecting the Christian poets. In ‘Opwaartsche Wegen’ [‘Upstream Ways’], they stated clearly that the audience desired to see the poetry of their own sphere collected, or at least catalogued.³³

In the absence of a socialist literary journal,³⁴ this ‘poetry of their own sphere’ was now broadcasted by VARA. The accompanying feature in *De radiogids*, which was not signed by Beversluis but for which he was probably responsible, conformed to a well-known pattern, providing background information about the reciting poets, mostly using the format of a short biography.³⁵ The critical positions that defined ‘De literatuur in de radio’, then, were omitted in this feature; though it is possible that Beversluis articulated some of his trademark comments through the microphone. This time, eulogies for the performing artists were written by enthusiastic subscribers to the listings magazine. On 29 March 1930, for instance, *De radiogids* published ‘a letter out of many’, written by a certain P. H., exulting:

If only you knew what great pleasure you have given me by organizing the declamations on Sunday morning, you would already feel a part of the gratitude I am about to express. Often these poets, with whom I am barely familiar, are very beautiful and pure, very determined and spirited. No doubt their purity is not always free of contamination, and their voice occasionally cracks, yet there is so much purity left that their work is a miraculous play with new sounds.³⁶

Evidently, such a letter had an advertising function: those readers who had not yet listened to ‘Dichters der opstandigheid’ may have been persuaded to tune in for the next episode. Retrospectively, P. H.’s letter is a rare reception document, for listeners’ reactions to early (not only literary) radio programmes have seldom been preserved.³⁷

The most interesting contributions to ‘Dichters der opstandigheid’ appeared in May 1930, towards the end of the feature’s lifetime. In a series of short articles, three performing poets uniquely described their first encounters with the radio studio. The first author to share his experiences was Jef Last, who characterized the microphone room as a ‘horror room’ and ‘an inhumane environment’:³⁸

33 ‘Zooals velen weten, verschijnt al enkele jaren een dergelijke bloemlezing van burgerlijke poëzie, n.l. “Erts”. Ook geven de nummers van “Gemeenschap”, het R. K. orgaan, eenige pas verschenen bloemlezingen van de christelijke dichters, die in “Opwaartsche Wegen” duidelijk te kennen geven, dat er behoefte bestaat bij het publiek het dichterlijk werk uit eigen kring verzameld te zien of althans daarvan een overzicht te hebben.’ ‘Dichters der opstandigheid’, *De radiogids*, 4.17 (1930), p. 7.

34 The socialist political-literary magazine *Nu* (‘Now’), which was edited by Israël Querido and A. M. De Jong, was founded in 1927, but folded already in early 1929.

35 Compare the issue on Frits Tingen: ‘Dichters der opstandigheid’, *De radiogids*, 4.23 (1930), p. 8.

36 ‘Als u wist, wat een geweldig genot u door het organiseeren van de Zondagochtend-declamaties aan mij bezorgt, dan al zou u een deel van de toekomstige erkentelijkheid bezitten. Wat mooi en zuiver zijn die mij nog zoo weinig bekende dichters vaak, wat een sterk streven en dikwijls wat een bezieling. Zonder twijfel is de zuiverheid niet altijd geheel onbeslagen, slaat hun ‘zangstem’ wel eens een enkele keer over, maar daar staat zooveel tegenover, dat toch weer de zuiverheid teruggeeft, dat het geheel een wonderbaarlijk spel wordt van nieuwe klanken.’ P. H., ‘Een oordeel over de Dichters der opstandigheid’, *De radiogids*, 4.23 (1930), p. 8.

37 Yet, there were also critical responses to ‘Dichters der opstandigheid’ in the left-wing newspapers *Het Volk* and *Voorwaarts*.

38 ‘griezelkamer’; ‘een onmenselijke omgeving’. Jef Last, ‘Opstandige dichters voor de microfoon: Wat ze ervan denken’, *De radiogids*, 4.28 (1930), p. 6:

Here in Hilversum, the loud-speakers keep on talking day and night, locked behind closed doors, completely indifferent whether someone listens or not. Here, green and red lights flicker in the corridors like mysterious warnings to invisible ghosts. Here, the people gracefully raise their words towards a little mirror that stands on a metal pillar in an abandoned room. Here, a couple of grey curtains split a room filled with growls and thunders, without anyone understanding where the noises come from.³⁹

Contrasting the graceful speakers with the ominous environment of the studio, Last's words show how alienating and even frightening the phenomenon of radio could be to contemporaries in the 1930s.⁴⁰ Moreover, given his emphasis on the 'indifferent' loud-speakers, Last did not seem to be convinced of the impact of his poetry being broadcast. A similar concern was raised by a fellow 'poet of the rebellion', David De Jong. Unlike Last, he counted on an 'audience of millions', but he had no illusions about the cultural effects of his declamation. De Jong imagined that his poems would circulate

through thousands of bewildered Sunday-morning rooms, primarily reaching the attentive and earnest comrades, but also those with tangled hair and pale, sleep-charged faces, who vent their peevish morning mood by giving the radio a wallop, as soon as 'this annoying and useless whining' starts. These poems also reach those friendly people who munch their eels in a cosy middle-class atmosphere, peeling the fat fish skins on the rhythm of the verses you actually liked yourself. And they reach the exhausted who are more dead than alive, whose many worries temporarily fade away when they listen to a piece of music — which they prefer over something like a poem, something that you also wrote for them, or actually especially for them. They also reach the room of a girl you talked to for a while; they reach your mother and father, who are listening with excited faces; they reach your brother with whom you have troubles; they reach a creditor who thinks you're a beggar; they reach a nice and dear comrade; they reach another who always kills you with his hateful, but sometimes truthful mockery.⁴¹

VARA's ideal of the cultural elevation of the masses is put into perspective here, since De Jong bursts the bubble in which working-class listeners really open up to cultural education; in his view, their exhausting lives demand music rather than poetry. Frits

39 'Hier in Hilversum praten luidsprekers achter gesloten deuren dag en nacht door, volmaakt onverschillig of er iemand luistert. Hier in de gangen flitsen groene en roode lichten aan als geheimzinnige waarschuwingen voor onzichtbare geesten. Hier werpen menschen gratievol hun woorden omhoog naar een klein spiegelkje dat in een verlaten zaal op een metalen paal staat. Hier zijn een paar grijze gordijnen gespannen dwars door een kamer waar het gromt en dondert van alle kanten zonder dat je begrijpt waar het geluid vandaan komt.' Last, p. 6..

40 For an international perspective on radio as an ominous medium, see William Boddy, *New Media and Popular Imagination: Launching Radio, Television and Digital Media in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 16–24.

41 'door duizenden ontredderde Zondagmorgenkamers, bij de aandachtige en ernstige kameraden in de eerste plaats, maar toch ook bij menschen met verwarde haren en fletse halfuitgeslapen gezichten, die in kregelige ochtendzieke stemming de luidspreker een opstopper gaven, zoodra 'dat vervelende gezanik waar je niets aan hebt' begint; bij palingpeuzelende, vriendelijke menschen, in knusse burgermanssfeer, die vette velletjes afkrabben op de cadans van wat je zelf wel een aardig versje vindt; bij afgejakkerde, doodgeploeterde menschen ook, die een 'moppie muziek' broodnodig hebben, omdat zij te veel zorgen aan hun hoofd hebben, dan dat zij zouden luisteren naar zooiets als een gedicht, iets dat je toch ook schreef voor hun, eigenlijk in de eerste plaats juist voor hen; in de kamer van een meisje met wie je wel eens gepraat hebt; bij je moeder en je vader, die met opgewonden gezichten zitten te luisteren; bij je broer met wien je 'mot' hebt; bij een schuldeischer die je een schooier vindt; bij een fijnen en genegen kameraad en bij een ander die je altijd vermoord [*sic*] met z'n hatelijke, maar soms ware spot.' David De Jong, 'Dichters der opstandigheid', *De radiogids*, 4.29 (1930), p. 8.

Tingen, the final poet who expressed his experiences in 'Dichters der opstandigheid', came to a similar conclusion. Although he dreamed of the 'democratization' of literature, debouching in 'a new contact between authors and people', Tingen realized he did not really speak to a mass audience through the microphone. Instead, he conceptualized his listeners as 'a difficult to estimate number of individuals, who listen separately from each other, and whose only connection at that time is the speaker'.⁴² Tingen feared this situation would last for a long time, for it was his contention that radio broadcasters offered too many programmes with too little profoundness: 'Are multiplicity and superficiality going to cost us attention, which is required for actual understanding?'⁴³

Tingen's question marks the end of the feature 'Dichters der opstandigheid' on 17 May 1930, a week after Reymer's broadcasting regulations that positively affected the 'multiplicity' of VARA's literary programmes. Before that time, literature played a marginal role in *De radiogids*: Beversluis's feature 'De literatuur in de radio' did not get off the ground, whereas 'Dichters der opstandigheid' — with the exception of the statements of the performing poets — was a source of information rather than progressing the literary development of its readers.

***De Radiogids* after the Broadcasting Regulations**

It would be plausible to hypothesize that the attention to literature in *De radiogids* increased after A. M. De Jong and Beversluis signed their contracts with VARA. The reality, however, was different. Although De Jong was initially brought in as a contributor to the listings magazine, he kept his activities to a minimum. It is likely that there were no formal arrangements with VARA concerning his contributions to *De radiogids*: although *Het volk* wrote about the positive effects De Jong's texts would have on the appeal of *De radiogids*, the author himself explicitly described his task merely as 'speaking regularly to VARA's listeners about prose works of literature'.⁴⁴ That is, he did not mention possible contributions to *De radiogids*, and indeed those were infrequent. In the rare event that De Jong wrote a text for the listings magazine, his contribution tended to be no more than a brief announcement of the topics he would address in the upcoming radio programme.⁴⁵

Like in the case of Beversluis's features, the exceptions to the rule are worth mentioning. On 20 September 1930, De Jong published an extremely critical essay on the Radio-Omroep Controle Commissie (ROCC; the Committee Controlling Radio Broadcasters), which had been constituted on 9 May of the same year to supervise the content of radio programmes in order to guarantee the morality, public order, and safety of the nation.⁴⁶ In his essay, De Jong portrays the members of the committee as a 'nugatory bunch of bureaucratic idiots', sarcastically proposing to 'collect money in order to establish a monument for the Controlling Committee'.⁴⁷ The censors were not

42 'verdemocratisering'; 'een hernieuwd contact tusschen schrijver en volk'; 'een moeilijk te schatten aantal individuen, die luisteren, onafhankelijk van elkaar, en tusschen wie [de spreker] op dat oogenblik het eenige verband is.' Frits Tingen, 'Dichters der opstandigheid', *De radiogids*, 4.30 (1930), p. 7.

43 'Zullen we niet door veelheid en oppervlakkigheid de aandacht verliezen, die voor waarachtig begrijpen een vereischte is?' Tingen, p. 7.

44 'voor de V.A.R.A.-luisteraars regelmatig te spreken over het proza-werk der litteratuur'. A. M. De Jong, 'Over proza in 't algemeen', *De radiogids*, 4.40 (1930), p. 10.

45 Compare, for instance, A. M. de Jong, 'Over Lodewijk van Deysse's krities werk', *De radiogids*, 4.42 (1930), p. 6.

46 For more information on ROCC, compare Huub Wijffes, *Radio onder restrictie: Overheidsbemoeding met radioprogramma's 1919-1941* (Amsterdam: Stichting beheer IISG, 1988).

47 'onbenullig stelletje bureaucratische stumpers'; 'geld in te gaan zamelen om voor de Contrôle-Commissie een monument te stichten'. A. M. De Jong, 'China in den aether', *De radiogids*, 4.48 (1930), pp. 15-16.

impressed with De Jong's mockery, though: shortly thereafter, he was obliged to send his radio talks to the ROCC, so that the contents of his literary programmes could be assessed before being broadcast.

A second exception is the republication of De Jong's new novel *Een verdoolde* (*A Lost One*) from 2 January 1932 onwards. Publishing this novel in the form of a feuilleton was a smart marketing move: through *De radiogids*, De Jong was able to reach more than 125,000 potential buyers. However, De Jong's choice to use the medium of the listings magazine caused some commotion. In July 1932, the Landelijk Comité Belangen Luisteraars (National Committee for Listeners' Interests) filed a complaint with the Minister of Justice, because it considered the novel as 'a series of images and expressions which harm morality'.⁴⁸ Especially the listings magazine of a radio broadcaster should not publish such immoral prose, the committee contended, for it was 'an institution that is available to every member of the family during the whole week'.⁴⁹ As far as we know, the Minister ignored this complaint, but De Jong himself rebutted without hesitation. On 30 July 1932, he published a cynical apology in *De radiogids*, excusing himself to 'those unchaste souls, those putrid lovers of profligate scenes, whose dirty instincts I have unwillingly titillated and who thank me by throwing garbage at me'.⁵⁰

Another problem related to *Een verdoolde* concerns the piracy it was subjected to in September 1932, when the novel entered the market before its official publication by the Querido publishing house. Criticized in the contemporary press for the 'highly primitive way of typesetting and printing, which suggests that it grew page by page on a small jobbing press',⁵¹ this clandestine edition was derived from the feuilleton in *De radiogids*. Although the publication was swarmed with typesetting errors, making it easy to unmask the forgery, the book was even 'for sale in smaller, especially unorganized bookshops'.⁵² In order to end the piracy, De Jong and Querido filed a complaint, which resulted in the exposure of the pressman responsible for the illegitimate copies and a financial arrangement between both parties.⁵³

After the publication of *Een verdoolde* in *De radiogids*, De Jong's contributions to the listings magazine become even more scarce. Until his departure from the broadcaster in 1940, he saved his ideas about literature for the ether, only sporadically hinting at the contents of his programme in VARA's weekly. The listings magazine even contains an indication that De Jong wrote his incidental contributions reluctantly. Responding to the editorial board's request to respond to the piracy affair in *De radiogids*, De Jong sighed: 'Alright then: unpleasant jobs need to be done every now and then'.⁵⁴ In that respect, De Jong and Beversluis were poles apart. Where the latter already attempted to establish literary features in *De radiogids* before Reymer signed his broadcasting regulations in May 1930, his commitment to VARA even intensified after this trademark month in the broadcaster's interwar history. He initiated the declamation programme 'Nederlandsche schrijvers en dichters voor den microfoon' ('Dutch novelists and poets

48 'een aaneenschakeling van het zedelijk gevoel kwetsende voorstellingen en uitdrukkingen'. 'Radionieuws: Het roman-bijvoegsel van de VARA-gids', *Het vaderland* (21 July 1932).

49 'een orgaan [...] dat de geheele week voor ieder lid van het gezin ter beschikking ligt'. 'Radionieuws'.

50 'de onkuise zielen, de voze verlekkerden-op-zedeloze-taferelen, wier vieze instinkten ik onwillens een aangename prikkeling geholpen heb en die mij tot dank nog met vuil smijten.' A. M. De Jong, 'O, die onzedelijke VERDOOLDE!', *De radiogids*, 6.39 (1932), p. 12.

51 'op zeer primitieve wijze gezet en gedrukt is en waarschijnlijk bladzijde voor bladzijde op een degelpersje is ontstaan.' 'Schending van de Auteurswet: Een boek van A. M. de Jong nagedrukt', *Het vaderland* (14 September 1932).

52 'zelfs in kleinere, hoofdzakelijk ongeorganiseerde boekhandels te koop.' 'Schending van de Auteurswet'.

53 Martien De Jong, *A. M. de Jong: Schrijver* (Amsterdam: Querido, 2001), p. 311.

54 '[M]en moet wel eens meer onplezierige karweitjes opknappen, dus vooruit maar.' A. M. De Jong, 'O, die onzedelijke VERDOOLDE!', p. 12.

in front of the microphone'), the lecture series 'Het verstaan van poëzie' ('Understanding poetry'), and wrote numerous radio plays.

Unlike De Jong, Beversluis flanked his literary radio work with regular contributions to *De radiogids*. As was the case in his feature 'Dichters der opstandigheid', most of his texts took an informative stance. In the second half of 1933, for instance, Beversluis maintained the feature 'Letterkunde in de komende week' ('Literature in the upcoming week'), summing up the literary programmes that VARA would broadcast in the period under consideration, mostly starring Beversluis himself. Every now and then, though, one can recognize the polemic rhetoric that was so typical for 'De literatuur in de radio'. This time, Beversluis did not assail AVRO and its individualistic book reviewers, but the controversial institute that was attacked by De Jong before, the ROCC. Like many VARA contributors, Beversluis was an important target of the committee's censors, who closely monitored his inflammatory fight songs and anti-establishment attitude.⁵⁵ In March 1933, referring to his series 'Het lied van verzet' ('The song of resistance'), Beversluis wrote:

It's out of the question that the author of this piece can broadcast the actual, real, modern protest songs. Radio listeners should look for these in print. [...] The poems that I will recite in the upcoming weeks are selected with care and are rotated ten times, before they end up under the magnetic needle of conservatism. One must be prepared, then, that — like last time, constrainedly (oh, the applicability of this word!) — we have to deviate from the programme. We have to be convinced, however, that every force is ultimately without power, no matter how different things seem to be. *La vérité est en marche, rien ne l'arrêtera!* The truth is marching and nothing will stop her!⁵⁶

'The magnetic needle of conservatism' refers to the ROCC's censors, who hindered Beversluis in his radio practice to the extent that he published the collection *Wilde loten: Bloemlezing uit geschrapt werk* (*Wild Sprouts: Anthology of Deleted Works*) in 1934, making his censored texts available to his audience. A quotation like the one above is, in Beversluis's case, certainly not rare: to him, the printed pages of *De radiogids* were a safe haven for criticizing censorship.

Beversluis's phrase 'The truth is marching and nothing will stop her!' testifies to a degree of militancy that soon became rare within VARA. Put under pressure by the Dutch government in 1933, the broadcaster's board members Arend de Vries and Jan Willem Lebon decided to change to a more moderate — that is, less politically engaged — course, which led to serious internal conflicts that resulted in the dismissal of their fellow board member Zwertbroek in 1934.⁵⁷ Ideologically, Beversluis had much in common with Zwertbroek: both refused to capitulate in their fight against censorship; both openly opposed the anti-revolutionary politics of Jo Colijn; and both sympathized with communist ideals. The departure of Zwertbroek deeply influenced Beversluis's radio practices, who refused to reconcile with the, to his mind, overly cautious approach of

⁵⁵ Wijffes, *Radio onder restrictie*, p. 147.

⁵⁶ '[E]r is geen sprake van, dat schrijver dezes de werkelijke, echte, moderne geuzenliederen kan brengen. De radioluisteraar dient deze te zoeken in de uitgaven. [...] De verzen die ik in de komende weken zal brengen, zijn met zorg gekozen, tienmaal omgewenteld, voor ze straks onder de magneetnaald van het conservatisme komen. Men zij er dan ook op voorbereid, dat wel eens, zooals den laatsten keer, noodgedwongen (hoezeer is dit woord toepasselijk!), van het programma wordt afgeweken. Men zij er echter van overtuigd, dat elke dwang zonder macht is op den duur, hoe anders het ook schijnt. *La vérité est en marche, rien ne l'arrêtera!* De waarheid is op marsch en niets zal haar tegenhouden!' Martien Beversluis, 'Het lied van Verzet', *De radiogids*, 7.19 (1933), p. 13.

⁵⁷ Compare Wijffes, *VARA*, pp. 94–103.

VARA's directors. After publicly calling them 'demagogues of the people' in late 1934, meanwhile openly supporting communist VARA technicians, Beversluis was suspended by the board and faced the end of his radio career.⁵⁸

In the pamphlet *Kaarten op tafel! Mijn schorsing bij de VARA* (1935, *Cards on the Table! My Suspension from VARA*), Beversluis looks back on the time he spent working for the socialist broadcaster. He was extremely critical of the arts policy of the VARA board (with the exception of Zwertbroek) and claimed that it repeatedly thwarted his work as a literary programme maker. Many of his proposals were, he wrote, 'sunk in the catacombs of VARA':⁵⁹ 'At VARA, the subjects of art and the artist are treated with superficiality, to an extent that cannot be described'.⁶⁰ In this account, the only blameless person in VARA's history was the poet Beversluis himself. Writing about 'Dichters der opstandigheid', he states that 'People should know that I brought socialist works on Sunday mornings for 4 years, a labour that was continued at the request of listeners. People remember the series of broadcasts in which young socialist authors, following my advice, performed their work through the microphone after a short introduction'.⁶¹ Although Beversluis's pamphlet is highly polemical and his accounts of the situation biased, it cannot be denied that VARA's literary programmes suffered a huge loss with Beversluis's suspension and eventual dismissal in 1935. From this year onwards, announcements of De Jong's radio shows appeared incidentally in *De radiogids*, but new features or critical texts were no longer introduced. The period between 1935 and the temporary abolition of the listings magazine in 1941 is thus characterized by literary soberness: Beversluis's departure ultimately resulted in the near absence of literature from *De radiogids*.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that literature played a marginal role in the listings magazine of the Dutch socialist broadcaster in the interwar period. In the first place, the attention to literary phenomena was initiated by a single contributor to the magazine, Beversluis, whereas the key literary author in the socialist camp, De Jong, did not seem to take *De radiogids* seriously. Besides, the few literary contributions to this listings magazine were informative in nature, primarily announcing contents of programmes, as opposed to making an enthusiastic campaign for literature in general and literary programmes in particular. Thus, the editorial board of *De radiogids* barely used the medium as a means of culturally elevating its working-class subscribers, which was nevertheless one of the core ambitions of VARA. Some of the spirited texts by Beversluis provide an important counterexample here, although his battle against colleagues and censors also shows that cultural elevation ran parallel to polemic position taking in the literary field.

The results of this research into a largely neglected media-historical source are in line with earlier insights into the position of literary radio programmes in the interwar literary field. Both radio book reviews and declamations had a modest impact

58 Wijffes, *VARA*, p. 103. Beversluis's career after his VARA work, as well as his national-socialist sympathies, are described in Gillis J. Dorleijn, "Maar Beversluis valt er buiten": Martien Beversluis, criticus van de rancune', *Kritiek in crisistijd: Literaire kritiek in Nederland en Vlaanderen tijdens de jaren dertig*, ed. by Gillis J. Dorleijn and others (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2009), 260–86.

59 'verzonken in de catacomben der VARA'. Martien Beversluis, *Kaarten op tafel! Mijn schorsing bij de V.A.R.A.* (Hilversum: Het Boekengilde, 1935), p. 3.

60 'Er heerscht bij de VARA een platheid ten opzichte van het behandelen der kunst en den kunstenaar, die alle beschrijving tart.' Beversluis, *Kaarten op tafel!*, p. 23.

61 'Men moet weten dat ik gedurende 4 jaren op dezen Zondagmorgen socialistische arbeid had gebracht, welke speciaal op verzoek der luisteraars werd voortgezet. Men herinnert zich de reeks uitzendingen waarin, op mijn advies, jonge socialistische auteurs voor de microfoon optraden, in het kort ingeleid.' Beversluis, *Kaarten op tafel!*, p. 16.

on discourses in print media, which formed the heart of the literary circuit in the 1920s and 1930s. However, content analyses of listings magazines can be highly relevant to literary and cultural historians, firstly because they show how novelists, poets, and critics experienced the new medium of radio (and later television), but most importantly because these magazines might give us insights into the ways in which these cultural bridge builders attempted to guide their literary works to the audiences they wanted to reach.

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