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The Scullery of the Broadcasting House: Female Writers and the Literary Features of the Dutch Broadcasting Organization KRO (1928–1940)

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Departing from the claim that media actively co-construct gender relations in a society, this article focuses on the interwar literary features of the Dutch Catholic radio broadcaster KRO. Similar to all broadcasting organizations in the Dutch Interbellum, the KRO aired these literary features in order to contribute to the cultural elevation of its listeners. Remarkable about the KRO, however, is that it created a division between an official literary feature, which was aired on Sunday afternoons, and a series composed of literary contributions aimed specifically at women, which was broadcast on Tuesday afternoons. Specifically focusing on their repertoires, this article primarily aimed to analyze the differences between these two features. It appears that the books of female writers were underrepresented in the official feature and overrepresented in the women's feature, which indicates that Dutch radio reflected the hegemonic gender relations in the interwar literary field.

Every second year, the International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT) organizes the IAWRT Documentary Awards competition, which celebrates outstanding documentaries made by women from all over the world. Its creed is “Make women’s voices heard . . . see their lives!” Although women have gained ground in radio and television over the years, the IAWRT still considers such an incentive a necessity, which is in line with the findings of contemporary research on gender in sociologically orientated media studies (e.g., Signorielli, 2012). Emphasizing that media tend to

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misrepresent the actual proportions of men and women in a population, Julia Wood's *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture* even argues that the underrepresentation of women in media is a way of distorting reality (Wood, 2009).

Most studies addressing the complex issue of gender and media focus primarily on the (non-)discursive formation of femininity and/or masculinity, thus unraveling the implied ideologies of (different kinds of) media institutions (cf. Gill, 2007). In general, this kind of research is aimed at analyzing the content of media images, both mainstream and alternative, which have proven to be highly influential in shaping and affirming the audience's view of the world (Oppliger, 2007; Smith & Granados, 2009). In the case of prewar European radio, however, such an approach is somewhat problematic, for there is a lack of sources to analyze; unfortunately, much of the early radio's history has literally vanished into thin air. Despite the relative absence of primary material, though, it is often possible to reconstruct the content of prewar radio contributions through the investigation of radio guides in general and their programming sections in particular. Requiring weeks of detective work in scarcely available sources, such investigation is highly time-consuming, but it can eventually result in both quantitative and qualitative observations concerning gender relations in prewar radio programming.

In this article, I examine an interesting case in the European history of broadcasting: the literary program of the Dutch broadcasting organization Katholieke Radio-Omroep (Catholic Radio Broadcaster), better known by the acronym KRO. The KRO was one of the four major public broadcasting organizations in the interwar Netherlands, each of them offering a weekly feature devoted to the evaluation of (both modern and historical) works of literature from the late 1920s and early 1930s. In contrast with its rival stations (AVRO, NCRV, and VARA), the Catholic broadcaster extended this airtime of literary discourse by introducing literature as a regular topic in the so-called women's hour on Tuesday afternoons (2–3 p.m.). Because of its significant potential in contributing to the literary socialization of Catholic women, this feature is worthy of a closer look. How did this strongly gendered part of the KRO's programming relate to its regular literary feature, called *Boeken en schrijvers* (*Books and Writers*), which aired on Sunday afternoons (2–3 p.m.)?

To answer this question, I will first introduce the KRO and its position in the history of Dutch radio broadcasting in the 1920s and 1930s, which is considered to be exceptional because of the "pillarized" structure of the broadcasting field (Briggs & Burke, 2009, p. 155). The next section also concerns some key figures in the KRO's literary program, with a focus on their ideas about cultural mediation in the field of Catholic literature. In the section thereafter, I critically examine the content of the literary programs, comparing the Sunday feature to the literary contributions in the women's hour. This analysis will lead me to conclude that the relation between the two

features reflected the hegemonic gender relations that were characteristic of the Dutch literary field in the interwar period.

INTRODUCING THE KRO AND ITS LITERARY FEATURES

On April 23, 1925, the pastor Lambertus Hendricus Perquin (1865–1938) founded the Catholic broadcasting organization KRO. In accordance with Dutch radio history, the KRO was a cooperative association, financing its activities with membership fees and acquired capital. Because of their nonprofit nature, the Dutch broadcasting organizations resembled the institutional model of “public service broadcasting” as described by Gorman and McLean (2003), with the important peculiarity that the different associations (with their roots below, most of them with a religious or political affiliation) had to share the available transmitters—just one until October 1927, and only two during the rest of the interwar period. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, this complicated system caused razor-sharp debates concerning the allotment of the vacant airtime and also led to severe arguments among the organizations involved. These struggles, which are known in The Netherlands as ‘de radiostrijd’ (*the radio battle*), were eventually resolved as the government amended the first Dutch broadcasting law on May 15, 1930, amongst other things stating that the four largest associations each received 20% of the available air time (Hogenkamp et al., 2012). With more than 100,000 members, the KRO was one of the selected organizations, representing the Catholic people and institutions of the Dutch pillarized society. In general, Perquin’s broadcasting association shared its transmitter with the Protestant organization Nederlandsche Christelijke Radio Vereniging (NCRV, or Dutch Christian Radio Association); the other transmitter featured the socialist Vereniging van Arbeiders Radio Amateurs (VARA, or Association of Laborer Radio Amateurs) and the liberalist Algemene Vereniging Radio Omroep (AVRO, or General Association of Radio Broadcasting).

As A. F. Manning (1985) has shown in his solid history of the KRO, the early years of the broadcaster were characterized by a twofold objective: first, its board of managers aspired to contribute to the cultural development of the rank and file of the Catholic world; and second, its ideologically oriented programs strived to neutralize the liberal and socialist dangers of the AVRO and VARA and to correct the NCRV’s preachers, who, in the KRO’s view, overflowed the Netherlands with their incorrect doctrines. Thus, the ideal of cultural mediation ran parallel to political and religious position-taking, which can be considered typical for the pillarized Dutch broadcasting system in the interwar period. Most of the time, though, the literary feature did not interfere with such political issues, because the most significant contributors were more occupied with the ideal of disseminating (their own) cultural values to their listeners than with the political haze of the day. The

successful writer Herman de Man (1898–1946), for example, the secretary of the KRO's literary committee between 1928 and 1930 who was responsible for the broadcaster's first literary lecture on March 3, 1928, explicitly presented himself as a cultural mediator who was predestined to bridge the gap between art and the community. Following an exchange of letters with the poet Jan Engelman (1900–1972), De Man considered this rift a result of the elitist individualism of many of his fellow literary authors:

The people are mired in tawdriness and the sum of aesthetics is merged into a select few. It is therefore, Jan, that I despise individualist art, for it intensifies the inequalities in our culture, making the public tastelessness even more woeful. (Vaartjes, 1999, p. 188)

[Original quote, translation by the author: *Het volk leeft in gore stijlloosheid en de som der aesthetiek is saamgevloeid in enkelen. Dáárvoor Jan, haat ik de individualistische kunst, omdat deze die wanverhouding steeds grooter, de volksche stijlloosheid steeds schrijnender maakt.*]

In De Man's view, broadcasting literary radio programs was one of the possible ways of to close the gap between art and the community. Nevertheless, his radio career came to a quick end as he moved to the southern part of the Netherlands in June 1930. Although less occupied with accessible forms of literature than De Man, his successor, Anton van Duinkerken (1903–1968)—who was responsible for the literary feature until the outbreak of World War II—also emphasized the necessity of cultural mediation, focusing more specifically on the lack of Catholic readers in the ever-growing Dutch book market. In his 1933 pamphlet *Welaan dan, beminde geloovigen*, he stated:

[Our people] vote as Roman Catholics, they found Roman Catholic organizations, they travel with Roman Catholic associations, they read Roman Catholic newspapers, they listen to the Roman Catholic radio broadcaster, and their children attend a Roman Catholic school. . . . Yet they do not know about the existence of the Roman Catholic book. (Van Duinkerken, 1933, p. 50)

[Original quote, translation by the author: *Ze stemmen Roomsch, ze organiseeren zich Roomsch, ze reizen in Roomsche vereenigingen, ze zijn abonnée op een Roomsche krant, ze hebben een Roomsche radio en ze sturen bunne kinderen naar Roomsche scholen. . . . Maar het Roomsche boek kennen ze niet.*]

A young and rising critic, Van Duinkerken held his fellow publicists responsible for the cultural lacuna that threatened the Catholic part of Dutch society. He argued that the discourse of ideological criticism was too closely interwoven with the practice of Catholic censorship, postulating that the suppression

of “dangerous books” negatively influenced the image of reading in general. The unremitting warnings against objectionable literature would ultimately lead to a widespread suspicion toward cultural artifacts, Van Duinkerken (1933) claimed: “Time and time again, our people are warned against the book, while good books are too seldom recommended” (p. 50: “*Ze worden herhaaldelijk tegen het boek gewaarschuwd, ze worden te zelden op het goede boek gewezen*”).

Van Duinkerken’s activity as the KRO’s literary secretary can be interpreted as an attempt to counter this publicity problem. In accordance with their coordinator’s plea for praising (morally and aesthetically) valuable works of literature, one of the characteristics of the literary feature is its high density of positive evaluations of recent novels and poetry. Without exception, in his own radio lectures—30 in total between 1929 and 1940—Van Duinkerken read about books that he found inspiring for some reason. This did not mean that the KRO’s literary criticism was a smokescreen for practicing book promotion in the commercial sense of the word (cf. Rubin, 1992), for Van Duinkerken and his colleagues did not hesitate to point out the weak spots of the literary works under consideration. Only incidentally, though, was their final verdict negative: In the case of the interwar KRO, radio was not a medium provoking polemics. On the one hand, this might be a consequence of the severe political and clerical practices of censorship that sought to banish controversial ideas, anarchistic programs, and offending language from the ether (cf. Wijfjes, 1988). On the other hand, there seems to have been a shared belief in the friendly nature of literary evaluation through the microphone, which transcended the (ideological) differences between the pillars of Dutch society, although it is important to stress that socialist radio reviewers did not hesitate to debunk novels from time to time. The liberal radio book reviewer P. H. Ritter, Jr. (1882–1962, AVRO), however, condemned such a negative critical attitude, passionately defending the importance of what he called “objective criticism”: “I fear that our culture in general, and the book in particular, is so endangered that it would be irresponsible not to defend this culture with positivity” (Van de Woude, 1937: “*Ik acht de cultuur, en het boek in het bijzonder, zoo bedreigd, dat het onverantwoord zou zijn, niet door positiviteit deze cultuur te verdedigen*”).

When it comes to this politics of positivity, the literary contributions in the KRO’s women’s hour on Tuesday were in accordance with the regular literary programs on Sunday. The first literary lecture in the women’s feature aired on September 10, 1929, and was delivered by Ellen Russe (1889–1942), a nationally known declamatory artist recruited by Pastor Perquin. Perquin decided to better streamline the women’s feature in the autumn of 1929, introducing a formula that defined the five major themes of the weekly women’s hour: social-ethical problems (coordinated by J. Källér Wigmans), housekeeping (N. Mens), literature (E. Russe), architecture and music (H. van der Schriek), and scientific and juridical topics (M. Steyger-Asperslagh).

In practice, each hour (often broadcast between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m.) covered two of these themes, which resulted in a decennium of monthly book reviews.

Being responsible for 124 out of 141 literary lectures in the women's hour (almost 88%) between 1929 and 1940, Russe was the first lady of her own program. Even more than De Man and Van Duinkerken, she embraced the concept of positive evaluation through the microphone, but whereas De Man strived to close the gap between literature and the community and Van Duinkerken sought to stimulate the Catholic reading culture, Russe aimed more specifically at the literary socialization of women. From our contemporary point of view, we might be tempted to interpret Russe's ideology of cultural mediation as a manifestation of interwar feminism, but she in fact defended a highly conservative conception of Catholic women. An interesting example in this regard is provided by her 1929 essay "*De Vrouw en de Schoonheid*" ["On Women and Beauty"], in which Russe unfolds her vision on the relation between (Catholic) women and the arts. Referring to the Genesis creation narrative, in which God assigned passive roles to the female sex, Russe argues that women usually do not possess creative powers: "The nature of a woman is not to create art herself, but to perceive works of art and to reproduce them" (Russe, 1929a, pp. 330–331: "*De vrouw is niet op de eerste plaats scheppende kunstenaars. Zij is meer dan zelf kunstschepend, kunst beluisterend en kunst reproduceerend*"). Particularly in her function as mother and wife, reproducing works of art should be considered one of women's key tasks: they are expected "to spread beauty, to drench their husbands' souls in it, and to bring the joy of beauty to their children" (Russe, 1929a, p. 332: "om schoonheid te helpen verbreiden, om schoonheid aan te kweeken in de ziel van den man, om schoonheid te brengen in het gezin"). With regard to literature, Russe's ideal woman thus acts as the aesthetic mediator of her household, who integrates the practice of reading into her family life. In reality, however, Russe contends that most women lack the erudition required to be such an aesthetic mediator—rather than studying serious works of literature, they spend most of their leisure hours reading trumpery romances.

To some extent, one can decipher Russe's essay as a mode of self-fashioning, making clear that she herself is not representative of the multitudinous women who fall short in their cultural tasks. It is important to note, however, that Russe took her activities as a cultural mediator very seriously. Not only did she encourage women to read literature by recommending recently published novels in her radio show, but she also delivered numerous lectures at the Christian People's University in Rotterdam and visited a broad variety of women's unions throughout the Netherlands, stimulating middle-class women to get acquainted with works of literature, both contemporary and historical, national and international. In my assessment, Russe's defense of the Catholic gender-role patterns is therefore more than

a conservative deed: By acceding to the convention of describing women in terms of reproduction, Russe, whether consciously or unconsciously, legitimized her critical activities—to be able to “drench beauty in their husbands’ souls,” Catholic women needed an experienced guide like Ellen Russe.

Concerning Russe’s contributions to the KRO’s women’s hour, one might expect that her definition of women as the aesthetic mediators of their households resulted in a discussion of novels that appealed to men, women, and children alike. Nevertheless, the praxis of Russe’s radio criticism seems to have been more complex. Indicative of this reality is the brief note in the Catholic radio guide of September 7, 1929 in which Russe announced the introduction of literature into the women’s hour:

As from today, the women’s hour will give attention to books and, if suitable, also to dramatic texts or performances. It goes without saying that we prefer to speak about works of literature that are especially meaningful to or attractive for women. (Russe, 1929b, p. 11)

[Original quote, translation by the author: *In het vrouwen-uurtje zal voortaan ook over boeken gesproken worden en indien het in de lijn ligt, af en toe over een toneelstuk of opvoering. Natuurlijk zullen bij voorkeur die werken behandeld worden, welke een speciale betekenis of aantrekkelijkheid bezitten voor vrouwen.*]

Unfortunately, Russe does not elaborate on the phrase “meaningful to or attractive for women,” but it is clear that she addresses Catholic women *themselves*, rather than conceptualizing them as negotiators between literature and their families. In the next section, therefore, I will further explore this issue by investigating the contents of Russe’s feature and by comparing them to the contents of the Sunday literary program.

THE SUNDAY FEATURE VERSUS THE WOMEN’S HOUR: A COMPARISON

As noted in the introduction to this article, one of the major problems associated with researching prewar European radio is the scarce availability of primary sources. Although technologies of recording phonic signals have been in existence since the late 19th century, existing audio fragments of Dutch interwar radio programs are extremely rare. In the case of the KRO’s literary features, the scenario is even more bleak—not only are there no audiovisual sources to investigate, but there is also an infinitesimal number of lecture transcripts available. Some transcripts of Anton van Duinkerken’s radio lectures, for example, are available in the critic’s personal archive in the Dutch Literary Museum in The Hague. There are also lectures that were

published in print after being broadcast: Many of the Dutch interwar Catholic literary periodicals contain one or more essays that were initially written for the literary feature. Furthermore, the Catholic radio guide contains detailed information about the KRO's literary programs: Almost without exception, its programming section mentions the topics of both the Sunday feature and the Tuesday women's hour, enabling us to compare the programs' repertoires quantitatively. In some instances, the guide also provides summaries of the contents of upcoming literary lectures, giving us further insight into the contributors' norms and value judgments.

Introducing more than 100 lecturers between 1928 and 1940, the nature of the Sunday literary feature was more heterogeneous than that of the women's hour, in which the lion's share of the lectures were delivered by Russe. Sunday's variety in speakers ran parallel to a variety in critical methods—whereas Russe's talks tended to concentrate on a single work of literature, numerous lectures in the Sunday literary feature discussed a wider selection of novels or poetry in order to outline the state of affairs in the (Catholic) literary field. Moreover, *Books and Writers* also frequently featured contributions with a literary-historical scope: more than a third of its lectures were devoted to general or historical topics, such as “The Life and Works of Vondel,” “Pentecost and Literature,” and “Humor in Dutch Literature.” Qualitatively, the most important difference between the Sunday feature and the women's hour, though, concerns the occurrence of negative criticism. Although we should not discard the possibility that Russe and her colleagues criticized the weaknesses of the novels they discussed, the introductions to their lectures in the Catholic radio guide are consistently positive toward the works of literature under consideration. An example is provided by Russe's characterization of Marino Moretti's Italian novel *La casa del Santo Sangue* (1929), which was translated into Dutch by R. van Nuffel in 1938:

Moretti, who lived in Bruges for many years, has sensed the prodigious enchantment of the Flemish city and succeeded to capture its atmosphere in highly subtle, artistic halftones, also weaving a sober love affair into the storyline. I would like to tell you more about this suggestive novel next Tuesday. (Russe 1938, p. 6)

[Original quote, translation by the author: *Moretti, die lange tijd in Brugge woonde, heeft de zeldzame bekoring der Vlaamse stad aangevoeld en de sfeer op een zeer fijne, kunstzinnige wijze in halfinten weergegeven en er een sobere liefdesgeschiedenis doorheen geweven. Over dit suggestieve boek zal ik u Dinsdag iets meer vertellen.*]

Russe's tone is merely positive, which is exceptional for the genre. As mentioned in the previous section, Dutch interwar literary radio lectures often conclude with a positive value judgment, but they are also characterized

by constructive criticism, involving both positive and negative comments (Dera, 2013). Illustrative is an announcement by F. A. Brunklaus (1909–1974), the KRO’s most active literary lecturer between 1935 and 1940, concerning Dirk Coster’s anthology *Het Kind in de Poëzie* (1935, *The Child in Poetry*). Although Brunklaus valued Coster’s sense for collecting poetry, he did not want to applaud uncritically: “Next Sunday we shall not conceal the weaknesses of Coster’s anthological activities” (Brunklaus, 1935, p. 10: “*En we zullen Zondag ook niet verzwijgen, wat we het zwakke punt in Coster’s bloemlezende werkzaamheid vinden*”). Remarks like these are absent in Russe’s introductory texts, suggesting that she may have avoided negative comments in her lectures entirely.

Given the absence of transcripts of the KRO’s literary lectures, an in-depth qualitative comparison of the Sunday feature and the women’s hour can hardly be realized. The program’s repertoires, on the other hand, can be contrasted in detail. Table 1 covers the nine most discussed writers in the Sunday literary feature between March 3, 1928 and June 30, 1940, as far as can be reconstructed through an analysis of the radio guide’s programming section.

The list is representative of the pillarized structure of the Dutch inter-war society—with the exception of Henriëtte Roland Holst, who nevertheless wrote religious-socialist poetry, all authors had an explicit Catholic signature. The great popularity of top-ranked Antoon Coolen, however, transcended the boundaries of the Catholic subculture, which is reflected in positive reviews of his work by non-Catholic critics, both on radio and in print. On such a national scale, however, other writers in the list were less successful. Until an editorial break in 1934, Albert Kuyle, for example, was highly influential in the inner circle of young Catholic writers around the magazine *De Gemeenschap* (1925–1941), but his literary work did not generate the same amount of attention in non-Catholic segments of the critical field (although it is important to note that his novellas were praised as interesting examples of “modern” prose). Similarly, the oeuvre of the Brit Gilbert

TABLE 1 Authors Most Frequently Discussed in the Sunday Literary Review, 1928–1940

Author discussed	Number of reviews
Antoon Coolen (1897–1961)	8
Anton van Duinkerken (1903–1968)	8
Albert Kuyle (1904–1958)	7
G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936)	4
A. A. L. Graumans (1894–1955)	4
Giovanni Papini (1881–1956)	4
Henriëtte Roland Holst (1869–1952)	4
Felix Timmermans (1886–1947)	4
J. A. Alberdingk Thijm (1820–1889)	4

Keith Chesterton was a valuable source of inspiration for numerous Catholic intellectuals, whereas its reception in liberal, Protestant, and socialist circles is less extensive. The same pattern occurs in the case of Giovanni Papini and J. A. Alberdingk Thijm, the latter of whom is often considered to be the founding father of the Dutch Catholic literary culture in the nineteenth century, thus functioning as a leading example for interwar Catholic mediators in their quest for further expansion of the Catholic literature. However, the criterion of cultural importance seems not to have been the only principle of selection in the Sunday literary feature: it is at least remarkable that Van Duinkerken, allocating the topics of the lectures to the feature's speakers, joined Coolen as the top-ranked author with his own (mostly essayistic) publications. Commercial motives might also be considered in the case of A. A. L. Graumans, who had his own KRO program, during which he told stories under the pseudonym D'n Dré.

Although she published four novels in the 1930s, Ellen Russe received critical attention in *Books and Writers* only once: Her debut *De klokkenmaker van Venetië* (1931, *The Clockmaker of Venice*) was one of the subjects of a 1932 lecture by Jan Nieuwenhuis (1896–1978). In her own feature, though, three of Russe's works were evaluated by her colleagues Sophie Nuwenhuis-Van de Rijst, J. M. Sterck Proot, and W. Brom-Struyck, which includes her among the nine most discussed authors in the women's hour, as shown in [Table 2](#).

Given the ideological signature of the radio broadcasting association under consideration, it is highly remarkable that five of the list's authors (Van Zeggelen, Van Ammers-Küller, Boudier-Bakker, Buck, and Rachmanowa) did not write in a Catholic tradition. Rather than in their religious background, the value of these authors seems to have lain in the fact that all of them were women writers. From this perspective, it is significant that [Table 2](#) contains only one male author: Giovanni Papini, whose work was actually translated from the Italian by Ellen Russe, which further strengthens the assumption

TABLE 2 Authors Most frequently discussed in the Tuesday Women's Hour, 1929–1940

Author discussed	Number of reviews
Sigrid Undset (1882–1949)	7
Marie C. van Zeggelen (1870–1957)	6
Jo van Ammers-Küller (1884–1966)	4
Ina Boudier-Bakker (1875–1966)	4
Pearl Buck (1892–1973)	4
Gertrud von Lefort (1876–1971)	4
Giovanni Papini (1881–1956)	3
Alja Rachmanowa (1898–1991)	3
Ellen Russe (1889–1942)	3

that literary radio features were sometimes used to disseminate culture for the financial sake of its coordinators.

The women's hour's emphasis on the works of female writers contrasts strongly with the focus of the Sunday literary feature. Regarding Russe's radio lectures, in 109 out of 124 cases it is possible to determine the sex of the discussed authors, which ultimately results in unmistakable percentages: 73.4% of her programs concerned a woman writer, whereas 26.6% focused on a man. The distribution in *Books and Writers* differed diametrically: in this case, 88.7% of the books under consideration were written by males, while women writers composed only 11.3% of the feature's prewar repertoire ($n = 380$). Expressing these numbers as ratios, we observe that the distribution between male and female writers was 1:3 in the women's hour and 7:1 in the Sunday literary feature.

How should we interpret this significant difference? We might just stick to the explanation of Russe aiming her lectures specifically at women, which is reflected in relatively more attention to "ladies' novels," a pejorative term used by influential Dutch interwar critics such as Menno ter Braak to implicate a certain type of novel in a psychological-realistic tradition that were mainly written by female authors and criticized for their old-fashioned naturalism. Van Zeggelen, Van Ammers-Küller, and Boudier-Bakker, all scoring high in Table 2, were typical Dutch exponents of this genre. It is plausible that Russe referred to this tradition of "ladies' novels," though not pejoratively, as she introduced the literary contributions in the women's hour as specifically dedicated to "works of literature that are especially meaningful to or attractive for women" (Russe, 1929b, p. 11). However, this explanation does not disguise the extremely differing gender ratios of both features: Out of the 35 novels written by female writers in Table 2, for instance, only six got critical attention in the Sunday literary feature as well.

Given the fact that female authors were underrepresented in *Books and Writers* and overrepresented in the women's hour, it is important to note that the aberrant airtimes of the two features implied a different composition of their audiences. On Sunday afternoons, during the broadcasting of the general literary feature, Catholic families usually spent their time in the domestic sphere, having attended worship in their church in the morning. Thus, the KRO programmed *Books and Writers* in a time slot that was also convenient for men, who served as breadwinners and were not able to listen to the radio that often. Hence, even if we do not take the utterly gendered title of the women's feature into consideration, it is highly unlikely that ordinary Catholic men regularly took notice of the literary lectures in the women's hour. Catholic women, on the other hand, were hypothetical listeners of both features.

The extent to which the literary contributions in the women's hour functioned separately from *Books and Writers* can be demonstrated by pointing to the overlap between the two features. On July 17, 1934, for example,

Russe evaluated the 1934 Dutch translation of Alja Rachmanowa's diary novel *Milchfrau in Ottakring*, which was also the topic of Jan Nieuwenhuis' lecture five days later. Similarly, in December of that same year, both Russe and Ad van Oosten (1898–1969) discussed Jo van Ammers-Küller's trilogy *Heren, knechten en vrouwen* (*Gentlemen, Servants, and Women*) in the same week. Such examples suggest that, to the programming board of the KRO, it was not an issue when a single novel received critical attention twice in such a short period of time. Apparently, the Sunday feature and the literary contributions in the women's hour must have had entirely different statuses.

CONCLUSION: RADIO REFLECTING HEGEMONIC GENDER RELATIONS

As previously stated, media function as important co-constructors of gender relations in a given (part of) society. In the case of the literary programs of the KRO, we can conclude that the Sunday literary feature framed the notion of a masculine author through an underrepresentation of women writers, while the women's hour could not act as a counterpart because of its disadvantageous broadcasting time. In this regard, the literary features of the KRO resembled the hegemonic gender relations in the Dutch literary field of the interwar period, in which we can observe a strong male dominance. As Geraldine Reymenants (2013) has pointed out, female authors suffered from a gender-specific socialization that made it almost impossible to operate successfully in the literary field. Not only did women often lack higher education, which made it hard for them to gain access to the hegemonic culture of elitist intellectualism, but in many cases they also were bound to the domestic sphere, impeding them from attending literary activities and participating in networks and peer communities. The ultimate consequence of this gender-specific socialization was the formation of a subfield of women writers in the literary field, which was further distinguished from male-oriented mainstream literature by prominent (male!) critics who often dismissed female authors' literary works, approaching them with a set of norms that distinguished valuable literature from ladies' novels (Andringa, 2006; Van Boven, 1992).

Arguing that the nature of a woman is to reproduce art rather than to create it, Ellen Russe was not exactly a critic of the institutionalized conception of women writers as mediocre authors. In accordance with her essay "On Women and Beauty," her radio lectures defended traditional motherhood as a woman's core virtue. For example, Russe praised Sigrid Undset's *Ida Elizabeth* (1932) to be a novel of great importance, for its protagonist might function as a model for the listening (female) audience: "Just like in all of Undset's novels, this woman, too, discovers her deepest joy in being a mother" (Russe, 1934, p. 7: "*Evenals in alle boeken vindt ook deze vrouw*

't diepste geluk in haar moederschap"). Despite such conservatism, however, Russe herself was definitely more than a traditional Catholic woman. In September 1930, a fellow female publicist, Phemia Molkenboer, wrote in the Catholic newspaper *De Tijd (The Times)*: "In our Catholic culture, there are not many women who actually take a step forward, and there are most definitely not many amongst them who are that thoroughly grounded, that versatile, and that talented as Ellen Russe" (Molkenboer, 1930: "*Katholieke vrouwen, die daadwerkelijk naar voren treden, die hebben wij niet veel en zeker niet die zoo grondig onderlegd, zoo veelzijdig ontwikkeld en zoo talentvol zijn als Ellen Russe*"). Russe's literary contributions to the women's feature might have been symptomatic for the peripheral position of female publicists in the Dutch literary field of the interwar period, but given the limited leeway for Catholic women to become involved in literary criticism, her activities are still quite notable.

This thought must also have occurred to Russe's contemporary Albert Kuyle, a misogynist who was preoccupied with holding off women who engaged in literary activities. In 1929, for example, he criticized Russe for representing the Dutch Catholic literature abroad: "Since when do we send our literary typists as a delegate to foreign countries, where they ring the doorbell of the wrong houses in order to drink some tea?" (Kuyle, 1929, p. 314: "*Sinds wanneer sturen we de litteratuur-typisten uit om in het buitenland aan verkeerde huizen te bellen en thee te gaan drinken?*"). Even more rude is his condemnation of Russe's commission in the artistic council of the Roman Catholic Laborers Union: "I can't understand why they hired Ellen Russe as an artistic domestic help, since she should be working in the scullery of the house" (Kuyle, 1930, p. 510: "*Wij begrijpen niet waarom men Ellen Russe als artistieke hulp in de huishouding in dienst nam, waar haar plaats in de bijkeuken is*"). Retrospectively, this metaphor of the scullery, whether misogynist or not, fits well to describe Russe's position within the field of interwar Catholic literature in the Netherlands. In the broadcasting house of the KRO, female authors at least got a room of their own, but in accordance with the hegemonic gender relations in the literary field, they never made it to the living room.

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