

SOME RECENT WORKS RELATING TO THE HISTORY OF ROMANIAN BROADCASTING: A REVIEW ARTICLE¹

PAUL E. MICHELSON

The history of Romanian broadcasting was rather slighted by academic analysts prior to 1989. The reason is obvious, since – as Eugen Denize has cogently pointed out² – the development of Romanian broadcasting was always linked with the political evolution of the country and therefore was subject from the outset to considerable state dictation, pressure, and limitation.³ In the context of modern Romanian history prior to 1989, it would, in general, have been unwise to critically examine such a sensitive aspect of state control.

In addition, even interwar Romanian liberals and democrats – like their French cousins – espoused *etatism* and were therefore philosophically helpless against the *reductio ad absurdum* of these same principles by the reactionaries, the nationalists, the authoritarians, the Legionnaires, and the Communists. Whether liberally-inclined Romanians would have been able to offer more than token resistance, given the circumstances of the late 1930s, is, of course, debatable, but having unilaterally disarmed themselves by adherence to moderate collectivism and pragmatic submission to the national state prior to the 1930s, they were much too far along the “Road to Serfdom” when the Age of Tyrannies manifested itself to do anything about it.⁴ It was not a matter of principle but of degree, and many paid with their lives as a consequence.⁵

¹ Works reviewed in this article include: Eugen Denize, *Istoria Societății Române de Radiodifuziune*, vol. I 1928-1944, pt. I 1928-1938. *De la începuturi până la dictatura regală*, București, 1998, vol. I 1928-1944, pt. II 1938-1944. *Dictaturile de dreapta (februarie 1938 – august 1944)*, 1999, vol. II *Instaurarea și consolidarea comunismului (1944-1965)*, 2000, vol. III *România sub Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965-1989)*, 2002; *Bibliografie radiofonică românească*, vol. I 1928-1935, coord. by Liliana Mușețeanu, București, 1998, vol. II 1936-1940, 2000, vol. III 1941-1945, 2003; *Orele culturii. Antologie de conferințe din Arhiva Societății Române de Radiodifuziune*, vol. I 1931-1935, București, 1998; *Microfonul vagabond*, vol. I 1932-1935, București, 1998; *Vocile memoriei. Antologie de conferințe din Arhiva Societății Române de Radiodifuziune*, vol. I 1931-1935, București, 1999; *Sărbători fericite*, vol. I 1932-1936, București, 1999; *Simfonicele Radiodifuziunii Române, 1928-1998*, ed. by Octavian Lazăr Cosma, București, 1999; N. Iorga, *Sfaturi pe întunerec. Conferințe la Radio 1931-1940*, ed. by Valeriu Răpeanu and Sanda Răpeanu, București, 2001; Ion Petrovici, *Talentul oratoric. Conferințe la Radio, 1932-1943*, București, 2002; C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Caracter și destin. Conferințe la Radio, 1930-1943*, București, 2003.

² E. Denize, *Istoria*, vol. I, pt. I, p. 118.

³ This was not, of course, a novelty in the interwar era: e.g., the BBC was a governmental monopoly in one of the freest of the European states, Great Britain.

⁴ The allusion here is to F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, London, 1944.

⁵ The fate of Mircea Vulcănescu, who was devoured by the state he had unquestioningly served, is a salutary example. Vulcănescu futilely attempted to combine ethical autonomy with his nationalist and collectivist/statist commitments: “Public servant, son and grandson of public servants, I never had another patron than the State, which I have served with all my power as much as and when I could.” Mircea Vulcănescu, *Ultimul cuvânt*, ed. by Marin Diaconu, București, 1992, pp. 35-36.

It would be a mistake to underestimate, however, the role which Romanian radio played in Romanian society, both as a medium for the diffusion of opinions, ideas, and propaganda, and as a supporter of elite and popular culture. The influence of Romanian radio was substantial: in 1932 it had 52,500 subscribers, while by 1939, this number had grown to 315,800. This number compares favorably to that of the leading newspapers of the era, which had between 120,000-150,000 subscribers.⁶

The first actual Romanian radio broadcast was in July 1925 from an experimental station at the Institutul Electrotehnic at the University of Bucharest (where courses on radio had been taught since 1920).⁷ Almost simultaneously, a law for regulating Romanian radio was passed by the Romanian Parliament. In 1927, the Council of Ministers established the Societatea de Difuziune Radiotelefonică din România, making Romanian radio when it went on the air in November 1928 an officially controlled, state monopoly.

Since interwar Romania was an insecure state preoccupied with significant problems related to its large minority populations and to the aggressively revisionist foreign policies of Germany, Hungary, and the Soviet Union, this was no surprise. Subsequently, Romanian radio lost most of whatever little independence and initiative it had when King Carol II instituted a royal dictatorship in 1938. Romanian radio was further subordinated in 1940 to the whims of the short-lived Legionary/Antonescu regime, and then to the desiderata of the wartime military dictatorship of Marshal Ion Antonescu. Finally, Romanian broadcasting went from bad to worse – out of the frying pan into the fire, as it were – with the Communist takeover at the end of World War II. Indeed, control of mass communications was one of the primary targets of the Communists in the initial phases of their rise to power.⁸

It is also not unusual that little scholarly discussion of Romanian radio appeared prior to 1945 since radio was in its infancy. Aside from a useful article in the *Enciclopedia României*,⁹ the principal source of information on Romanian radio from this era is the journal published by the Societatea de Difuziune Radiotelefonică, “Radiofonia.”¹⁰ This very useful resource – though obviously one that must be used with a good deal of caution – remained largely unexploited prior to 1989.

During the Communist period, 1945-1989, Soviet-style censorship not only applied to broadcasting, it also applied to writing about broadcasting. Nevertheless, Victor Crăciun was able to publish (or, in several cases, at least write) a series of works that provide considerable insight into the history of Romanian radio. These works include three

⁶ Gh. D. Mugur, *Radiodifuziunea*, in vol. *Enciclopedia României*, ed. by Dimitrie Gusti, vol. 4, București, 1943, p. 170.

⁷ For this and other details about early Romanian radio, see E. Denize, *Istoria*, vol. I, pt. I, *passim*. E. Denize provides two helpful chronologies for the 1908 – August 1944 era *ibidem*, pp. 309-314, and *ibidem*, vol. I, pt. II, pp. 345-348.

⁸ *Ibidem*, vol. II, pp. 33 ff., and Paul E. Michelson, *The East European Revolution Revisited (La révolution de l'Europe de l'Est revisitée)*, in “Revue roumaine d'études internationales,” vol. 27, 1993, nos. 1-2, pp. 49-64.

⁹ Gh. D. Mugur, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-170.

¹⁰ “Radiofonia,” vol. 1, appeared in November 1928, as the successor to “Radio Român,” which had first appeared in September 1925. Its title changed frequently: “Radio și Radiofonia,” vol. 2, 1929, “Radio-Fonia,” vol. 5, 1932, “Radio,” vol. 8, 1935, “Radio Adevărul,” vol. 9, 1936, and “Radio Adevărul. Radiofonie, Televiziune, Știință pentru toți,” vol. 10, 1937 – vol. 13, 1940. It was replaced in 1940 with “Radio România.”

anthologies;¹¹ *Confesiuni sonore. O istorie a literaturii române la microfon*, based on a doctoral dissertation that explored the archives of the Societatea Română de Radiodifuziune (SRR);¹² an unpublished manuscript work in the Arhiva SRR on radio theater with which Crăciun collaborated;¹³ and a monograph edited by Crăciun dealing with the beginnings of Romanian radio that was completed in 1972, but also remained unpublished owing to the tightening of Romanian culture following Ceaușescu's "cultural revolution" that began in 1971.¹⁴

The rest of the bibliography from the Communist era is sparse: a short biography of the founding father of Romanian radio, Dragomir Hurmuzescu (1865-1954), that focusses primarily on his teaching career, was published in 1967;¹⁵ Ileana Corbea and Nicolae Florescu's three volumes of interviews (including radio interviews) published between 1973 and 1984;¹⁶ a selection of N. Iorga's radio lectures republished with an introduction and notes by Valeriu and Sanda Râpeanu in 1976;¹⁷ Iulius Țundrea's work concentrating on Romanian radio's role in Romanian cultural development which appeared in 1979;¹⁸ Vasile Rebreanu and Miron Scorobete's two volumes of selections from the archives of Radioteleviziunea Cluj, published in 1979-1981;¹⁹ and Țundrea's account of some of the highlights of the historical recordings in the holdings of Romanian radio which appeared in 1982 along with a plea for the establishment of a Romanian Audio Museum.²⁰

Given this spotty treatment, the ambitious publications program of the Societatea Română de Radiodifuziune following the overthrow of Communism in 1989 has been a hugely welcome initiative. This program was inaugurated in 1998 on the 70th anniversary of Romanian radio with the first products of its newly-established publishing arm, Casa Radio.

Pride of place in these efforts goes to the late Eugen Denize's four volume history of the SRR, published between 1998 and 2002, which not only thoroughly explores the archives and the publications of the SRR for a coherent synthesis, but provides a whole

¹¹ *Articole vorbite. Conferințe radiofonice*, București, 1972; *Manuscrise și voci. Scriitori români la radio*, București, 1975; and *Scena undelor (Teatrul radiofonic)*, București, 1980.

¹² București, 1980.

¹³ Petre Codrea, George Cernea-Comănescu, Victor Crăciun, and Maria Repede, *Teatrul radiofonic*, unpublished monograph in the Arhiva Societății Române de Radiodifuziune, 1972. See E. Denize, *Istoria*, vol. I, pt. I, p. 277.

¹⁴ *Contribuții la cunoașterea Radioteleviziunii Române*, coord. by Victor Crăciun, unpublished monograph in the Arhiva Societății Române de Radiodifuziune, 1972, with contributions by Pavel Câmpeanu, Victor Crăciun, Liviu Ionescu, Viorica Marinescu, Anton Niçulea, Nicolae Stanciu, and Nicolae Wegener. These archives also contain an unpublished, undated collection of documents, *Documentar privind trecutul Radiodifuziunii Române*, probably gathered for the preparation of the *Contribuții*; and the unpublished, undated memoirs of a 1940s director general of Romanian radio, Vasile I. Ionescu, *Începuturile Radiodifuziunii Române. Scurtă monografie*. E. Denize, *Istoria*, vol. I, pt. I, pp. 262-263.

¹⁵ Constantin A. Ghica, *Dragomir Hurmuzescu*, București, 1967.

¹⁶ *Biografii posibile. Interviu*, ed. by Ileana Corbea and Nicolae Florescu, 3 vols., București, 1973-1984, to which they have added a fourth volume dealing with the post-1989 era, *Convorbiri prin timp*, București, 2003.

¹⁷ Published as N. Iorga. *Sfaturi pe întunec. Conferințe la radio*, ed. by Valeriu and Sanda Râpeanu, București, 1976. The original edition was published in 1936-1940. See below for further discussion.

¹⁸ *Înscipții pe o bandă de magnetofon. Vocația culturală a radioului*, București, 1979.

¹⁹ *Cu microfonul dincoace și dincolo de Styx*, ed. by Vasile Rebreanu and Miron Scorobete, Cluj-Napoca, 1979-1981.

²⁰ *Fonoteca de aur. Un muzeu sonor al culturii românești*, București, 1982.

host of details previously unavailable that historians of modern Romania will have to take into account. The structure of Denize's account is straightforward: each volume begins with a presentation of the setting, followed by a discussion of the evolution of Romanian radio in the respective period, a chapter or chapters on the political use of radio in each era, and a concluding chapter on the cultural activities and personalities who played a role in Romanian radio during 1928-1938, 1938-1940, 1940-1941, 1941-1944, 1944-1965, and 1965-1989. There are also useful chronologies for the periods up to 1944 as well as a listing of the leadership of the SRR between 1928-1944.

The first two chapters of volume I, part I, are devoted to the historical setting of modern Romania and the beginnings of Romanian radio up to 1928. This is followed by a chapter on the evolution of the SRR between 1928-1938 and a chapter dealing with "Radio and Political Life (1928-1938)." The picture presented above of the entanglement of radio and state control in Romania is fleshed out in this and subsequent volumes, a story of continuous decline into further and further political tyranny as a consequence of which Romanian Radio was "transformed into an instrument of propaganda in the service of the rulers of the moment."²¹

However, Denize writes: "Radio, as with many other inventions and discoveries, was a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it could be used for deceitful propaganda, indoctrination, and the intoxication of the public opinion ... but on the other hand, it could be used for entertainment ..., for raising the level of a society's knowledge and cultural attainments, for the consolidation of the national and spiritual unity of a people and a country."²² Between 1928 and 1938, these latter aspects were foremost on the agenda of Romanian radio, and Denize provides extensive quotation and analysis of various radio lectures by Romanian notables. The Romanian intellectual elite utilized radio to disseminate current views and theories on Romanian culture and history. At the same time, the elite often was used to promote the political line of whatever regime was in power, particularly after 1938, a story told in subsequent volumes.²³

The final two volumes of Denize's work deal with Communist Romania. Not surprisingly the history of Romanian radio parallels the history of the country even more closely between 1944 and 1989: "The history of Radio ... is a history in miniature of the larger history of Romania."²⁴ Following the Soviet takeover and an immersion of Romania in Soviet/Slavic culture for the first two decades after World War II, there was a significant improvement – by Communist standards, at any rate – between 1964 and 1974. The same period saw advances in the technical resources and capabilities of Romanian radio.

However by the mid-1970s, Romanian politics and culture took a marked turn for the worse as Ceaușescu's peculiar brand of "national communism" swept the intellectual and cultural landscape bare. Further, as "the general economic situation of the country deteriorated, Radio also began to suffer in material terms ... while the number of hours fell.

²¹ E. Denize, *Istoria*, vol. I, pt. I, pp. 183-184.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 185.

²³ For samples, see the anthologies discussed below.

²⁴ E. Denize, *Istoria*, vol. II, p. 349.

Broadcasts of the 1980s were increasingly uninteresting ...”²⁵ The reader will find the perspectives that this story brings to that larger history useful, both for the enforced Sovietization of Romanian culture between 1948 and 1955, and for the “privatization” of Romanian radio under the Ceaușescu in the 1980s (“privatization” in the sense of becoming ever more fixated on the great leader and his wife).²⁶

Denize’s history will be a mandatory starting point for all concerned with the history of Romanian media and required reading for historians concerned with the period 1928-1989. His work is also a good example of the kind of spade work still needed in key areas of Romanian culture and history.

The material contained in the SRR archives deserves further sifting, collection, and publicity, a task begun by the SRR in a number of volumes published after 1998. Certainly the most important aid to this task is the three volume *Bibliografie radiofonică românească*.²⁷ An alphabetical listing of every speaker on Romanian radio between 1928 and 1945 (almost a who’s who of the Romanian intellectual elite during these years), these volumes give the dates, topics, and reference information on presentations. The editor, Liliana Mușețeanu, notes that much of the work done in the Arhiva SRR has focussed on recorded materials rather than on written texts. Ironically, the text archives are much richer than the sound archives, though in both cases there are broadcasts for which neither text nor recordings exist. In addition, apparently few texts are available prior to 1932, though excerpts might be available in the journal of the SRR.

These lectures are an invaluable resource for scholars. And for the later years of the 1930s and the 1940s, they shed considerable light on opinions and stances later conveniently obscured.²⁸ These volumes should be in the hands of every historian of 20th century Romania.

The SRR has also devoted a good deal of effort to publishing collections, based in large part on these bibliographical endeavors. There are two categories of such efforts under consideration here: compilation volumes that collect the broadcast lectures of a single personality; the second is topically-based anthologies.²⁹ Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940) was widely considered the “Dean of Romanian Radio Lecturers.” It is fitting that his radio talks, partially published in 1936-1940 under the title *Sfaturi pe întunerec*,³⁰ have now been

²⁵ *Ibidem*, vol. III, pp. 363-364.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 67 ff.; pp. 363-366.

²⁷ *Bibliografie radiofonică românească*, coord. by L. Mușețeanu, vol. I-III.

²⁸ See for example, the paeans to the 1938 constitution, the Carolist youth groups, Carolist anniversaries, and the like, by Petre Andrei, Andrei Rădulescu, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Cezar Petrescu, Dimitrie Gusti, and others; or the hymns to national revival, the heroic new ideology, the new man, and the like, by Constantin Noica, P. P. Panaitescu, Ernest Bernea, Dan Botta, Emil Cioran, and others during the 1940-1941 Legionary-Military dictatorship. Both of these eras are discussed in E. Denize, *Istoria*, vol. I, pt. I, Chapters II and III.

²⁹ For both types, the reader will want to consult E. Denize’s *Istoria* for context and further discussion.

³⁰ N. Iorga, *Sfaturi pe întunerec. Conferințe la Radio*, 2 vols., București, 1936-1940, covering 1931-1938. V. Crăciun, *Confesiuni sonore*, p. 106, notes that Iorga’s first radio lecture was in 1929. Mention should be made here of two other noteworthy pre-1989 collections of radio addresses, those by Iorga’s rival, C. C. Giurescu (1901-1977), *Din trecut*, București, 1942, containing 25 lectures; and those of Perpessicius (D. S. Panaitescu, 1891-1971), including over 150 radio broadcasts between 1931-1938, first published as vol. 7 of his *Opere*, București, 1975, and a number of radio addresses published in his *Alte mențiuni de istoriografie literară și folclor*, București, 1967, vol. II 1958-1963 and vol. III 1963-1967.

collected by Casa Radio into a complete, scholarly edition by Valeriu and Sanda Râpeanu.³¹ Iorga was one of the few lecturers that was allowed to speak without a formal manuscript; but since he was always accompanied by his personal stenographer, Henri Stahl, most of his lectures have left a paper trail.³²

Two other compilations have appeared subsequently, presenting the lectures of the philosophers Ion Petrovici (1882-1972) and Constantin Rădulescu-Motru (1868-1957).³³

The second type of compilation is anthological in nature, usually consisting of several dozen selections with a particular thematic emphasis. *Orele culturii* appeared in 1998, containing selections on Romanian culture generally from 1931-1935. The volume is divided into two sections, the first dealing with the humane sciences, the second with the fine arts. A few of the subjects and their presenters give a flavor of the volume: Emanoil Bucuța on the Royal Cultural Foundations; Constantin Moisil on the Romanian Archives; Gala Galaction on the Book of Job; Dimitrie Gusti on the problem of books; Ion Cantacuzino on James Joyce; Ionel Jianu on the Simu Museum, Lucia Sturdza Bulandra on the nature of theater; and Mihail Sebastian on politicians in literature.

This was followed by *Vocile memoriei* (1999), also anthologizing 1931-1935, which presented memoirs, biographical portraits, and other commemorative broadcasts. Typical selections include: Octavian Goga's memories of Aurel Vlaicu, N. Cartoian about Ion Neculce, Henri H. Stahl on Mahatma Gandhi, and Mihail Sadoveanu on Alexandru Ioan Cuza.

Two other volumes conclude our look at this series: *Microfonul vagabond* (1998), which contains travel notes, essays, and radio reports by leading cultural figures from 1932-1935, represents a typical genre of Romanian writing and broadcasting; and *Sărbători ferice* (1999), which collects seasonal broadcasts from 1932-1936 related to Romanian winter holiday customs and traditions, also by noted authors and personalities.

One final reference volume issued by Casa Radio during this period is *Simfonicele Radio-difuziunii Române* (1998), which is a repertory of some seventy productions by the Romanian Radio Orchestra, edited by Octavian Lazăr Cosma. The purpose of this exhaustive volume is to provide a guide to these performances for both the researcher and the general public.

It is gratifying to be able to take notice of these pioneering works published by Casa Radio. Eugen Denize's multi-volume *Istoria* will remain a primary reference for a long time to come as well as a guide not only to the history of Romanian radio and in turn to 20th century Romanian history, but also to the resources of the SRR. His contribution is even more remarkable given that he virtually had to start from scratch. The three volume *Bibliografie radiofonică* is also an important contribution that helps unlock the radio archives to historians and others. It is to be hoped that similar works covering the period after 1945 will be forthcoming. The complete edition of N. Iorga's radio lectures is a model of its kind, a handsome volume with a profusion of useful notes and bibliographical information. Finally, it would also be well if eventually an index/guide to the contents of the anthology series is made available for future reference.

³¹ The Râpeanus also published a two volume edition of the original (București, 1996).

³² V. Crăciun, *Manuscrite și voci*, p. 167.

³³ I. Petrovici, *Talenta oratoric*, and C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Caracter și destin*.