

B. P. Hasdeu – hypostasis of the “Romanian specialist”

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Abstract

The purpose of any specialist, regardless of the sphere approached, is to serve the aspirations of scientific and cultural development of his people. However, in the broad process of searching for scientific truth, the possibility seen by some scientists to achieve this goal is scientific controversy, often manifested in a harsh duel of words.

This article aims at confronting some of the most representative figures of Romanian linguistics, a confrontation developed in the realm of ideas. Using weapons such as stinging irony, humor and sarcasm, Alexandru Philippide outlines a new hypostasis of the “Romanian specialist”, this time materialized in the person of Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu.

1. Introduction

Remarkable personality of Romanian culture, philologist and man of culture, Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu is after Dimitrie Cantemir and Heliade Rădulescu, together with Maiorescu and Eminescu among the figures whose work overcame the grinding action of time. Representing the typology of the encyclopedic scientist, through the vastness of his preoccupations, Hasdeu proves an untiring thirst for knowledge and truth, succeeding in becoming a pioneer in many fields of activity.

Having an “extremely sensitive and vehement temperament” (Sacerdoțeanu, 1942, p. 8), endowed with a quintessentially polemical nature, “the writer and the scientist cannot create without confronting those around him” (Drăgan, 1972, p. 243). Believed that in the realm of science, controversy always offers two advantages: 1. It helps to definitively clarify some problems, until then more or less controversial; 2. It reveals and brings to light, often without appeal or recourse to cassation, the superficiality of one of the fighters (Hasdeu, 1872, p. 21), his work, especially the scientific one, lives through its polemical outbursts.

Since “the demon of controversy has been a constant of the Hasdeean personality” (Goia, 2014, p. 28), he enters into a confrontation in the realm of ideas with many of his contemporaries. Such a battle of words has Hasdeu with another important linguist of the time, Alexandru Philippide, a keen observer of his time, becoming, in his sense, a hypostasis of the “Romanian specialist”.

Observing it in a distance of a century, this controversy that brings together two personalities who through their contributions and activity have clarified and made known the problems of the Romanian language, may seem outdated, but the contribution to science following this exchange of ideas, ensures the two linguists the gratitude of researchers forever.

2. “The Romanian Specialist”

In an attempt to build a scientific climate beneficent to the development of Romanian culture, benefiting from the effects of European cultural and scientific development of the nineteenth century, Professor Alexandru Philippide wants to imprint strength and rigor to scientific activity. Noting that “the Romanian scientist mirrors the Romanian society. Such master such man. How is the country and the scientist” (Philippide, 1907, p. 68), the linguist from Iași is dissatisfied with the behavior and scientific results of

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the Romanian scholars. Aware of his intellectual strength, Philippide tries to impose in the public and cultural life of the country the model of a perfect scientist. Thus, his controversy is mainly focused on the condition of the intellectual in both Romanian and universal culture.

The phrase “the Romanian specialist” was imposed by the Iași linguist through his articles and studies of a controversial nature, especially *Specialistul român, Un specialist român la Lipsca și Cum se apără specialistul român*. This category of Romanian specialists, flourishing after 1866, includes a series of improvised scholars, pedantic intellectuals, among those “who stain the paper” (Philippide, 1907, p. 81), characterized by strict specialization and narrow horizon.

Philippide’s critical attitude outlines the figure of the “Romanian specialist”, a figure who takes over, in turn, the image of his contemporary personalities, such as Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, Sextil Pușcariu, Aron and Ovid Densusianu, Heimann Hariton Tiktin, Gustav Weigand, Adolf Tobler etc. They and others like them are ridiculed, and their works are persiflated, sometimes even abolished, all this done with arguments carefully selected by the critical eye of the scientist from Iași.

2.1. B.P. Hasdeu – hypostasis of the “Romanian specialist”

The model of the “Romanian specialist” drawn by Philippide is embodied exemplarily by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu. A famous name of his time, Hasdeu was endowed with two great qualities: “the frightening erudition and the relentless verb” (Drăgan, 1972, p. 84), qualities that attracted, in addition to fame, the “irreconcilable enemies even from those who, through the community of concerns, should have been the closest to Hasdeu, like Alexandru Philippide” (Poghirc, 1968, p. 229).

Thus, a sample of the second type of controversy identified by Simona Șova at Philippide (Șova, 2013, p. 70)¹, addressed to Hasdeu’s theories regarding the influence of the Dacian substratum on the Romanian language, we identify at the end of his *Principii* (Philippide, 1894, p. 288–307). The passage was published by junimists in the article *D-l Hasdeu și «Istoria limbii române»* from „Convorbiri literare” (Philippide, 1895, p. 846–869). In the editorial note at the beginning of the article, the philological merits of Hasdeu are recognized, considered a “remarkable personality in the field of Romanian philology” (Philippide, 1895, p. 846), author of some original theories and ideas. What is imputed to him is the fact that “his brilliant imagination and spirit, often prevented him from seeing clearly in the material he had to study, determined him to prefer ingenious and seductive constructions instead of unadorned truth” (Philippide, 1895, p. 846).

In this article, Philippide accuses the author of *Cuvente* of adopting the unproven opinion of Kopitar, who claimed that Romanians and Albanians belong to the same people, that Albanian is the old Illyrian untouched by Roman influence, that the Romanian language is the oldest of the Romance languages, its origin must be sought long before Trajan, etc. Hasdeu’s research aimed to identify in Romanian some words of origin if starting from those common to Romanian and Albanian, to illustrate the fact that the articulated genitive-dative of masculine and feminine nouns is formed in Romanian and Albanian, all starting from on the assumption that Romanians and Albanians have the same ethnic origin and once used the same language. In order to support his theory, the Bessarabian linguist establishes a series of rules that he must follow in order to research the etymology of a word, but, as Philippide demonstrates, “he is the first who does not stick to them” (Philippide, 1895, p. 859). Philippide’s demonstration is based on the examples provided by Hasdeu, which he proves erroneous by applying the rules set by him. For example, with regard to Rule 11: “«to distinguish whether a word is part of the mesological, genealogical or anthropological sphere, that is to say, whether it is borrowed from another language, whether it is inherited from the mother tongue, or if it has its origin in human nature, so that its appearance

¹The analysis of Philippide’s polemical discourses highlighted two distinct ways of arguing: on the one hand, the diatribe generated only by the recording of scientific truth and the desire to combat, with solid arguments, erroneous scientific opinions issued by foreign and Romanian linguists (see the Philippide–Meyer Lübke, Philippide–Weigand polemics), and on the other hand, the controversy caused by personal dissatisfaction with Romanian scientists, whose linguistic truths were the result of intuitions and assumptions, not of meticulous scientific research (see the Philippide–Hasdeu, Philippide–Pușcariu polemics).

may be possible everywhere and always»” (Philippide, 1895, p. 852), Hasdeu is wrong when he gives a genealogical origin to the verbal suffix *-u* from *câpâtuésc, gemuésc* and to the verbal suffix *-u* in Albanian, *peşkue, plumbue*, because both of these languages have independently developed anthropologically (to use Hasdeu’s terminology as well) this form (pag. 155)” (Philippide, 1895, p. 855).

The failure to follow his own rules leads Philippide to find that Hasdeu’s entire work is in vain, his efforts to reach pre-established conclusions, based only on unprovable methods, have no purpose.

But what stirs Philippide’s revolt is disobedience to phonetic laws. Formed in the atmosphere of the Neogrammatical School, Philippide attached paramount importance to phonetics in the study of languages, and observance of phonetic laws was essential for him in reconstructing the history of languages and the etymology of words. The disavowal of the arguments brought by Hasdeu in support of his hypothesis continues by demonstrating some errors of the etymologies established by him, errors caused by the non-observance of the phonetic laws. Here is an example: “The suffixes *-mán* and *-ándru* he puts them on the same side as the Dacians, without taking into account the regular transformation to *î* of stressed *a* followed by *n* in the Roman words and without quoting any sure example of stressed *a* followed by *n*, from Roman words and from the same circumstances, not transformed to *î*” (Philippide, 1895, p. 853).

The critical attitude towards Hasdeu is also generated by the fact that he made some elementary phonetic mistakes, which “cannot but be considered out of sight” (Philippide, 1895, p. 859), thus becoming defining for the typology he represents, but also for “the whole psychological state of our country” (Philippide, 1895, p. 860). Thus, the Bessarabian linguist “explains the passage of *sglávoc* «by physiological accommodation: the non-vibrating consonants *s, v, c* from *sglávoc* turn into the non-vibrator *c* the vibrator *g*», and considers but on *v* as a sound at whose production the expiratory current does not pass through the vocal strings in vibration, while in reality *v* is precisely one of the vibrating sounds” (Philippide, 1895, p. 859).

The scientist from Iași resembles Hasdeu’s plea for a “floating through all kinds of inaccurate creations of induction, where you get dizzy with a faint sway from one language to another” (Philippide, 1895, p. 860), depriving him of any merit on its author: “Hasdeu meets the truth only by chance where he meets it” (Philippide, 1895, p. 860).

Philippide’s critique will arouse “Hasdeu’s passionate and combative temperament” (Macrea, 1954, p. 8), his reaction materializing in a short response article entitled *Philippidiotisme* from the “Revista nouă”. Hasdeu’s suggestive title to his article reflects, on the one hand, the tone he approached in his dialogue with Philippide, and, on the other hand, the overwhelming irony of Hasdeu’s polemical style. Through a sublime ridicule, Hasdeu states that his opponent instructs “wild goose chase” (Hasdeu, 1893, p. 160), insulting, at the same time, his pride by comparing his deeds with those of a madman locked in a mental home.

In the context of the existence of terms of Gothic origin in the Romanian lexicon, a theory founded by Hasdeu, more on account of intuition, Philippide builds in the pages of the *Origini* a true ironic discourse against him: “And Hasdeu in *Istoria critică a românilor*, București, 1875, p. 297, says: «earching everywhere in the preceding paragraphs and shaking all the strings of the Romanian language, we find no shadow of indisputable goticism, at least in two eighths of a single word». It is redundant to add to this pretentious statement that in those previous paragraphs Hasdeu had not scoured or thought anything of the Romanian language!” (Philippide, 2014, p. 355).

The hostile attitude towards Hasdeu is due not only to the penetrating critical spirit of Philippide, who could not get over the unbelievable, often fanciful, theories circulated by him, but also to the junimist environment, which looked critically at Hasdeu’s scientific activity (Ivănescu, 1984, p. XI). Hasdeu’s controversies with Maiorescu and the junimists were well known at the time, the adversity between the two great school principals was due to “great differences in temperament, spirit, political views and character” (Goia, 2014, p. 41).

In the article *Specialistul român*, identifies three phases in the evolution of the Romanian scientist in the field of philology. The first phase has as representatives people such as: Laurian, Papiu Ilarian, Cipariu,

Asachi, Săulescu, Kogălniceanu and Aron Pumnul, all reunited by the sincere desire to know. Their works were rich in content, but formless, and their authors “somewhat dry, were seduced more by the glory of science than by science itself, and were bitten to the heart by the serpent of glory” (Philippide, 1907, p. 70), a fact that made in Romanian culture “talents and geniuses like mushrooms” (Philippide, 1907, p. 70). The second phase is illustrated by the person of V.A. Ureche, whose works have remained “fortunately unpublished” (Philippide, 1907, p. 70) and by that of Hasdeu, about whom, recalling the ironic humor of Humulești, Philippide states that such to other specialists in the second phase, “a brocade and her with the army in the fence” (Philippide, 1907, p. 73). The representative of the third phase of the evolution of the Romanian specialist is Titu Maiorescu, an old collaborator of Philippide, who, in the opinion of the professor from Iași, although he claimed to be militant against the empty form, considered this science and became its owner, growing under his aegis “a plethora of Romanian specialists, who reduced science in the Romanian country to a minimum” (Philippide, 1907, p. 78).

As for Hasdeu, Philippide ironically confesses that he is “superior to all Phase II scholars” (Philippide, 1907, p. 73). The professor from Iași repeatedly emphasizes that, like the specialists in this category, the Bessarabian scientist is characterized by the lack of thorough knowledge: “he knows nothing about the physiology of sounds” (Philippide, 1907, p. 74).

Philippide’s critique also focuses on the erudition that Hasdeu displayed on every occasion: “soon he seized all the crafts of science and started a blazing fire of his own names, quotes, news, magazines, and friends with celebrities.... So that the world was really left speechless” (Philippide, 1907, p. 73). A harsh critique of the way Hasdeu chooses to present his ideas is also found in the following passage: “Mr. Hasdeu knew nothing, but only book titles, quoted from browsed works, a jar thrown into the eyes of the amateur reader, that is, the empty form” (Philippide, 1907, p. 76), referring to the bibliographic richness, a fundamental feature of Hasdeu’s writings, as a hypostasis of the Romanian specialist.

3. Conclusions

Despite the fact that “he was sometimes seduced by the imagination where there was no obvious material evidence” (Macrea, 1954, p. 7), Hasdeu’s merits in substantiating the scientific research of the Romanian language are indisputable. A researcher with a multilateral vocation, the author of *Cuvente din bătrâni* is one of the figures who dominated the past of Romanian culture, having valuable contributions in the field of philology, history, lexicography, etc. Unfortunately, family dramas proved to be “a very vulnerable point, an Achilles’ heel” (Munteanu, 1963, p. 41). Thus, the work springing from the Hasdeean genius sometimes led more to “enticing hypotheses than to concrete results” (Macrea, 1954, p. 10).

Philippide’s animosity towards Hasdeu cannot be explained by a “reconciled hatred”, a hatred unleashed by the article *Philippidiotisme*, which “developed the then unjustified claims of the young researcher” as Cicerone Poghirc claims in the dedicated monograph of Hasdeu (see Poghirc, 1968, p. 230). Although categorized as unacademic and unjust (Poghirc, 1970, p. 164), the hostilities shown by Philippide towards the Bessarabian scientist must be attributed to respect for people and knowledge. Being penetrated by the sense of responsibility towards science, he enters the fight with the “specialist” scientist, in order to know the scientific truth and clarify the reading public, his real purpose being to prove the veracity of the theories issued.

Important for illustrating the polemical essence of the professor from Iași, the figure of the “Romanian specialist” created more than a century ago, forms a much more vivid and current picture of the vulnerabilities of scientists than it may seem to many. Analyzing the current scientific life, a Philippide of today would discover descendants of the Romanian specialist at every turn.

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