REVIEW

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concerning the competition for the academic position of **Professor** in professional field 2.1. Philology (Theory and History of Literature), Department of New Bulgarian Studies, announced by New Bulgarian University in *State Gazette*, No. 65 of 17 July 2026.

In the competition announced by the Department of New Bulgarian Studies at New Bulgarian University for the academic position of Professor in professional field 2.1. Philology (Theory and History of Literature), Assoc. Prof. Morris Fadel, DSc, is the sole candidate. In accordance with the requirements of the Academic Degrees and Titles Act for participation in the competition, the candidate has submitted the following documents: a professional CV; a bibliography of publications not submitted at previous stages of his academic career; an annotated statement of his research contributions; a list of citations; and information about his participation in international and national academic forums.

His monograph *The Broken Frame: The Destabilization of Representation in Literature*, together with his studies and articles, presents him as a scholar whose work has made significant contributions to Bulgarian literary studies. The documents submitted for participation in the competition for the academic position of Professor not only meet but substantially exceed the requirements of the Academic Degrees and Titles Act.

Morris Fadel graduated from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with Master's degrees in Bulgarian Philology (1996) and Philosophy (2000). In 2002, as a full-time doctoral student at the Institute for Literature of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, he obtained the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD) with a dissertation entitled *History and Interpretation in the Thought of Paul de Man*. In 2022, he defended his dissertation entitled *Detectives, Intelligence Officers, Cold War: Crime and Spy Fiction in Comparative Perspective* and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Sciences (DSc) in professional field 2.1. Philology.

During the period 2002–2005, he worked as a literary scholar and research associate at the Institute for Literature of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Since 2005, he has been a member of the academic staff of the Department of New Bulgarian Studies at New Bulgarian University. In 2010, he was appointed to the academic position of Associate Professor in Theory and History of Literature. During the period 2005–2010.

His scholarly research is characterized by an interdisciplinary approach, combining theoretical and literary, historical, and comparative perspectives. A particular place in his research is occupied by issues of literary interpretation, the relationship between history and literature, and the generic and cultural transformations of crime and espionage fiction in the context of the Cold War. His professional activities encompass research, teaching, editorial work, and academic administration, contributing to the development of humanities education and contemporary Bulgarian studies at New Bulgarian University.

In his monograph *The Broken Frame: The Destabilization of Representation in Literature*, Associate Professor D.Sc. Maurice Fadel places at the center of his research one of the fundamental problems of contemporary literary theory: the nature and functions of literary representation, as well as the mechanisms through which a literary text constructs, transforms, and problematizes the perception of reality.

The choice of research topic is both timely and theoretically grounded. Within the context of contemporary humanities scholarship, the question of the relationship between language, reality, and artistic realization occupies a significant position, as it challenges the traditional understanding of literature as a transparent, clear, almost mirror-like intermediary between reality and its artistic reflection.

The metaphor of the "broken frame" invites a questioning of the established models through which representation in literature has traditionally been conceptualized. This also establishes the conceptual framework of the study, which does not seek trivial solutions but instead pushes the boundaries of interpretation as far as possible, bringing to light unexpected and previously unrecognized meanings in classical literary works.

Within the precise theoretical framework developed by M. Fadel, the analysis implicitly engages in a critical dialogue with simplified approaches grounded in a mimetic understanding of literature, tracing the complex relationships between reference, signification, interpretation, and the production of meaning. This makes it possible to approach representation not merely as a reproduction of the external world, but as a semiotic and interpretative construct whose boundaries can be tested and challenged by the literary text.

The conceptual framework unifying the studies and articles in the book is the premise that literary theory has historically evolved through its resistance to representation, Yet it never succeeds in overcoming it once and for all. One of the scholarly contributions of the study lies not only in examining theoretical propositions through the lens of literary texts that differ in genre, aesthetics, and message, and are situated within a broad historical context, but also in challenging the persistence of unambiguous readings. This makes it possible to trace how the

instability of representation manifests itself both in the linguistic and formal organization of the text and in its philosophical, ethical, and political dimensions.

The monograph comprises an introductory essay and seventeen articles and studies, organized into two main sections: "Against Language" and "Despite Language." This compositional structure not only establishes a logical connection between the individual thematic strands but also carefully develops the scholarly argumentation in the construction of a coherent theoretical framework. The first section focuses on the limits of linguistic mediation and problematizes the possibilities of intuitively and directly apprehending reality as reflected in literary works. The second examines literature under the conditions of inevitable linguistic mediation, inviting a reconsideration of both classical and contemporary works beyond the surface appearance of meanings, the concreteness of images, and the superimposed sociocultural and political connotations.

Although each of the studies and articles in the book constitutes a convincingly argued and self-contained whole, they engage in an active intertextual dialogue concerning the possibilities and limitations of language. The compositional principle is productive because it outlines the tension between the aspiration to move beyond linguistic representation and the inevitable return to it. The titles of the two sections are emblematic, as they insist that resistance to language is not tantamount to its complete transcendence. Literature is conceived simultaneously as an attempt to break free from established regimes of signification and as a practice that continues to operate through language.

Maurice Fadel is a scholar with a profound grounding not only in literary studies but also in philosophy. This is clearly reflected in the intellectual and scholarly merits of his work. The methodological principles of the study require an examination of the fundamental theoretical foundations that have shaped both the historical and contemporary reception of research into the nature and limits of representation.

Viktor Shklovsky's conception of art as the restoration of the sensation of the object is particularly important to the argument. Defamiliarization disrupts automated perception and transforms the familiar into something unfamiliar. Within the context of the monograph, this principle acquires a broader significance: the literary text does not merely reproduce the object but can direct attention to its materiality beyond preconceived notions of it.

William Empson's concept of ambiguity makes it possible to explain how a literary work obstructs unambiguous understanding. Different meanings may interact, complement one another, or come into conflict, providing clear evidence that a text does not necessarily lend itself to a single, definitive, and internally consistent interpretation.

The discussion of the hypogram in Michael Riffaterre's work further enriches this picture by introducing the problem of the hidden presence of another text within the work under analysis. Particularly significant is the contradiction identified here: the theory undermines the conception of the literary work as a reflection of external reality, while at the same time potentially reinstating a mimetic principle at the level of sign structures. Representation does not disappear; rather, its object changes.

The philosophical trajectory associated with Hegel and Paul de Man extends the problem to the historical existence of art. If the beautiful is conceived as the sensuous manifestation of the Idea and as the attainment of symbolic wholeness, a critical reading of this wholeness opens up the possibility of rethinking the present condition of art. In Fadel's interpretation, artistic creation can retain its relevance not through the perfection of representation but through its rejection of, or resistance to, representation. It is no coincidence that Maurice Fadel's doctoral dissertation, "..." was highly acclaimed as a brilliant example of interdisciplinary research.

A significant contribution of the study is the consistent development of an argument that extends the critique of representation from the relationship between the literary work and reality to the relationship between literature and language itself. From this perspective, the literary text can resist not only mimesis but also its own semiotic nature. This thesis is tested through analyses of works from Bulgarian and world literature.

In the readings of Yordan Yovkov, including the short story "Po Zhitsata" ("Along the Wire") and the cycle "Ako mozhekha da govoryat" ("If They Could Speak"), the possibility emerges of a form of understanding that is not entirely mediated by the linguistic sign. The example of Mokanina points towards the recognition of another's suffering, which is not explained through any specific linguistic mechanism. The concept of "Telepathy" functions not as a literal parapsychological claim, but rather as a theoretical figure for immediate, unmotivated, and non-rationalized understanding. In his analysis of animals in Yovkov's work, they are not reduced to symbolic substitutes for the human, but are considered as individualities that resist subsumption under the generalizing concept of "the animal." In this way, the reading opens up perspectives on alterity and the limits of anthropocentrism.

In the analysis of Osip Mandelstam's "Silentium," the poetic experience is conceived as an attempt to reach a state prior to form and prior to the establishment of the rules of representation. Beauty emerges as an unpredictable encounter that cannot be confined within pre-established models. In the discussion of Anna Akhmatova and Elisaveta Bagryana's translation of her poetry, the emphasis falls on the sonic materiality of poetry and on the

possibility of experiencing it beyond its semantic content. This raises the question of the affinity between the poetic text, musicality, and the mechanics of memorization.

The study of Ani Ilkov's "Love of Nature" highlights the distinction between *saying* and *utterance*. Language is considered not merely as a means of conveying content, but also as a material event in which the very act of speaking acquires significance. In the analysis of Pushkin's *Don Juan, or The Stone Guest*, the statue of the Commander is presented as an object that does not embody merely established—even trivial—linguistic, mythological, or causal relations. It simply exists and acts, thereby calling into question the possibility of describing an artistic object exhaustively.

In the second part, the problem of language is examined through specific literary-historical and critical contexts. The analyses of Yavorov, Geo Milev, Penyo Penev, Aleksandar Gerov, Nikolay Liliev, and other authors demonstrate how a literary work can destabilize its own meanings. In the reading of Yavorov's "Homeland," two semantic layers are distinguished: the homeland as word and the homeland as time. These do not form an unambiguous logical relationship; consequently, the concept remains open, amorphous, and unstable, resisting interpretations that would remain fixed over time and thus proving particularly alluring to researchers working in different historical periods.

Maurice Fadel's reading of Geo Milev's poem "September" dismantles ideological clichés by drawing attention to the convergence of the images of slaves and executioners. In doing so, it convincingly problematizes the unambiguous interpretation of the work as an apologia for the September Uprising of 1923. This approach is indicative of the author's fundamental methodological position: a literary text can undermine imposed, even canonized, notions of meaning that appear to be self-evident on the surface of works incorporated into the canon.

The analyses of Penyo Penev, Aleksandar Gerov, and Nikolay Liliev expand the field of inquiry to encompass the relationships between language, ideology, time, old age, and irony. In the essays "Nothing but Transparency" and "Truth as Shock and Boredom," literary phenomena are situated within the contexts of rebellion, sovereignty, violence, and power. The discussion of Jonathan Littell's novel *The Kindly Ones* raises the question of the relationship between artistic and historical reality. In this way, the book establishes a broad range of interpretative applications and confirmations of Maurice Fadel's central theoretical propositions.

A crucial theoretical point is the distinction between the representational and performative functions of language. Whereas representation presents a particular reality, performativity constitutes reality through linguistic action. Fadel, however, does not accept performativity as

a definitive solution to the problem. Even when language performs an action, that action remains articulated through signs and is therefore not entirely free of a representational dimension. The example of Yavorov's poetry demonstrates that linguistic force does not simply abolish representation; rather, it may depend on representation in order to become recognizable.

Particularly significant is the reading of Yovkov, which shifts the emphasis away from traditional humanist interpretations towards questions of alterity, individuality, and the limits of human understanding. The analyses of Yavorov are equally valuable, insofar as they seek to identify the specific logic of poetic thought beyond the conventional classification of the author as a Symbolist. The examination of communist political culture through the categories of concreteness, abstraction, singularity, multiplicity, and figurality likewise demonstrates the potential of literary-critical methodology to be applied to broader cultural and political phenomena.

Amid the ongoing debate about the boundaries and significance of the literary canon, M. Fadel's book makes a contribution of its own. The canon is approached as an image of literature that determines which works are granted representative status and which remain outside the established picture of literary history. In connection with the positions of Alexander Kiossev and In Dimitar Kamburov's work, two distinct aspects of canonicity are outlined: on the one hand, its political and institutional construction and, on the other, the capacity of literary works to generate new interpretations and undermine established meanings. Maurice Fadel distinguishes between two mechanisms through which representation is destabilized. External destabilization takes place through social, political, historical, and ideological factors, whereas internal destabilization stems from the grammatical, semantic, and rhetorical organization of the work itself. He develops a convincing argument for the usefulness of drawing clear boundaries, as this makes it possible to trace both the influence of cultural and institutional conditions and the resistance embedded in the form of the text.

What makes *The Broken Frame: The Destabilization of Representation in Literature* particularly valuable is Maurice Fadel's complex methodological approach. He successfully combines literary-historical analysis, theoretical deconstructions, and psychoanalytic observations, making equally effective use of both interdisciplinary perspectives and close reading. His strong theoretical background, extensive knowledge of the sociocultural context, and precise intellectual reflection are essential characteristics of Fadel's scholarly style. These qualities are also reflected in the complexity of his methodology: rather than applying a single

universal method to all literary works, he adapts his analytical tools to the specific features of each individual text. Thus, theory functions as a means of activating interpretation rather than as a predetermined framework to be imposed upon the literary material.

The scholarly originality of the study lies precisely in this distinctive interpretative perspective characteristic of Maurice Fadel, as well as in his productive and original attempt to bring European theoretical concepts into dialogue with specific issues in the Bulgarian literary tradition. The author does not mechanically reproduce established literary-critical assessments but instead places familiar works within new conceptual relationships. The interdisciplinary dialogue with philosophy, aesthetics, hermeneutics, and cultural studies broadens the possibilities of analysis without obscuring the artistic specificity of the works under consideration.

The study's main scholarly contributions can be identified as follows: the systematization of the problem of representation as a relationship not only between literature and reality but also between literature, language, the sign, and meaning; the elucidation of the contradictory nature of attempts to overcome representation; the extension of the problem to encompass literature's resistance to its own signifying nature; the critical examination of performativity as a possible, though not definitive, alternative; the connection of theoretical concepts with analyses of Bulgarian and foreign authors; and the insistence that the very concept of literature must be reassessed in each individual interpretation.

The Broken Frame: The Destabilization of Representation in Literature is a significant work of literary theory, distinguished by a clearly articulated and scholarly substantiated authorial position, a broad theoretical horizon, and original interpretations. The book's principal contribution lies in its examination of representation in all its complexity: not merely as a relationship between the literary text and reality, but also as a question concerning language, the sign, meaning, knowledge, and the limits of interpretation.

Particularly valuable are the intersections of philosophical reflection and close reading, the attention paid to the internal contradictions of literary works, and the productive incorporation of Bulgarian writers into the theoretical framework of the analysis and its intertextual dialogues. The monograph offers neither a definitive definition of literature nor a universal method for its study. Instead, it maintains that the concept of literature and the mechanisms of artistic representation must be subjected to critical scrutiny in every individual case. It is precisely this openness that constitutes an important part of the book's heuristic potential.

Maurice Fadel's monograph is an original and significant scholarly work that makes an indisputable contribution to contemporary Bulgarian literary studies. It enriches the debate on

representation and offers productive perspectives for future research into literature, language, and meaning.

The undeniable merits and scholarly contributions of the research presented by Associate Professor Maurice Fadel, D.Sc., in this competition provide me with compelling grounds to recommend to the Academic Jury that he be elected to the academic position of **Professor**.

12 November 2026 **Prof. Erika Fridrikova, Ph.D.**

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