REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Svetlana Stoycheva

on the application of Assoc. Dr. Maurice Fadel
for occupying the academic position of "Professor" in the professional field 2.1. Philology
(Theory and History of Literature),
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The candidacy of Assoc. Dr. Maurice Fadel for the professorship of Theory and History of Literature, announced by NBU, is convincingly substantiated and relies on serious academic authority. In terms of scientometric indicators, he significantly exceeds the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. Along with his four monographs, articles and studies, the twenty reports (only in the last five years!) presented at international scientific conferences are impressive. His aspiration to be part of the international scientific dialogue and his research work to be recognizable outside the national academic context is not so common among Bulgarian literary critics working in Bulgaria. The final evaluation of the application should also take into account Fadel's contributions to the development of curricula, the scientific supervision of graduates and PhD students, the compilation of scientific publications, his overall administrative activities as Head of the Department of New Bulgarian Studies. An essential part of this activity is the organization and conduct of scientific conferences, seminars and premieres, the intensive calendar of which confirms the presence of the Department in the academic community inside and outside NBU.

In this review, I will focus on the main research work with which Maurice Fadel participated in the competition – the monograph "The Broken Frame. The Hesitation of Representation in Literature". Bibliographically, the book belongs to the theory of literature, but it seems that this is the first framework that its author undertakes to break: the boundary between theory and literature, when the latter is thought beyond representation: "theoretical knowledge and literary text become identical in the quest to go beyond mimetic imagery and trivial notions of experience, to go into abstraction" (p. 9). This also raises the question of the possible rupture of

theory with its representationalist "predecessor", as Fadel calls it – aesthetics. However, he argues for the impossibility of such a rupture, while complicating the very subject of the study: "The problem with representation is that it is difficult to define and, accordingly, it is not easy to understand whether and to what extent we overcome it. When we imagine that we are beyond it, it may turn out that we have dealt with only one kind of representation, but we have come across another." (p. 10) Thus, Fadel comes to the problematization of the very concept of literature. In search of "non-theoretical" approaches to it, he turns to the analysis of specific literary texts, which in turn test the theory. The critical reflection in this introductory chapter of the possibilities and limitations of the theoretical framework of the study shows the high degree of theoretical reflexivity of Fadel and represents one of the many contributing moments of the monograph.

The work feels deeply personal – not only because of the personal dedications in it, but also because the author's intellectual position, individual logic of thinking and the imprint of his life experience are clearly recognized. Fadel's literary idiolect is distinguished by a specific imagery (I am tempted to recall the comparison with which he describes the way in which La Fontaine's messages move away from unambiguity: it becomes "as imperceptibly and decisively as an experienced swordsman draws his sword", p. 98). The starting point for it can stem from both theoretical intuition and a thesis generated by personal life experience. Especially indicative is the beginning of the text "Telepathy and Understanding": "A man chooses a domestic animal for the same reason that he marries... The need for a witness to our lives comes from the fact that we are unable to prove our own presence" (pp. 27–28).

I will also emphasize the contextual richness of the exposition: the works are considered in broader literary and philosophical connections. Relying on solid literary and philosophical theses (those of Blanchot, Bataille, Derrida, Cassirer, Shklovsky, Jakobson...), but sometimes starting from them, Fadel makes a kind of probe in the work of individual authors. These probes have the potential to shake established critical ideas about them, which have become "universally valid" – and we are talking about canonical authors such as Yovkov, Liliev, Yavorov, Penyo Penev, and more contemporary artists such as Konstantin Pavlov, Andrey Germanov, Ekaterina Yosifova. Analyses are not confined to any genre or literature.

Maurice Fadel's approach as a literary critic is distinguished not only by its erudition, but also by the very train of thought in which the principle of obvious intellectual self-challenge is embedded. It presupposes not just a consistent argumentation of the initial thesis, but also an active

search for possible counterarguments and interpretations challenging it (indicative in this respect are the reflections on "Yovkov's struggle against language", p. 40).

The titles of the two parts, in which the separate texts ("Against Language" and "Despite Language") are united, together with the subtitle of the monograph, outline the main theoretical problem around which the study is built. Undoubtedly, his hypertheme is language, but not in itself, but as a condition and at the same time as a problem of literary representation. "Against Language" points to texts that destroy linguistic structures, resist linguistic conventions, "remain silent" in Wittgenstein's way, and question the possibility of words providing direct access to any world, including the human itself. "In Spite of Language" introduces another aspect of the same problem. Here, Fadel traces how certain linguistic and aesthetic strategies make it possible to radically rethink culture, human and social order. Literature continues to produce meanings and build worlds, despite the impossibility of language to guarantee their transparency and completeness of representation. As Fadel notes, neither linguistic opacity nor the apparent transparency of expression guarantee the adequacy of representation. Literature cannot give up language, but it can give up its representative pretensions. It is this tension that seems to me essential to understanding the image of the "Broken Frame" – a broken but still (and always) frame. The two parts do not offer two opposing solutions to the problem, but reveal its internal insolubility.

The first (and seemingly the most categorical) confrontation "against language" is examined in Yovkov's cycle "If They Could Talk". It is in it that language turns out to be the least important dividing mark between man and animal: "To speak is not important." (p. 34). In place of the repressed political, Fadel emphasizes the biological power of man over the animal. In this opus, several fundamental oppositions are problematized and rearranged: animal – human, animal – human, mimesis – performativity, name – language, telepathy – understanding and, of course, language – mimesis. Although no one has spoken of telepathic hermeneutics and communication in Yovkov (p. 39), it is precisely this production that allows Fadel to argue the thesis that the writer avoids symbolism and language, and hence the irrelevance of the semiotic analysis of his texts. (But what do we do with the signs of beauty in this author?)

More significantly, Fadel finds arguments not only against one of the leading interpretive lines in Yovkov Studies, but also against another, related to the anthropocentrism of the author. If the statement that "If They Could Talk" is not an anthropocentric work" (p. 43) may sound striking,

the proposed argument makes it convincing. The subsequent conclusion already seems logically logical: "The concepts of 'animal' and 'animal' are a hegemonic and ideologizing synecdoche, which, for our own needs, falsifies and mystifies a multitude of beings, our contact with which we are unable to know how it happens..." (p. 44). This production also prepares the larger theoretical clash in which Maurice Fadel consciously enters – with one of the leading ideas in the literary thinking of the twentieth century: "that literature is a linguistic, symbolic activity" (pp. 39-40).

In the perception of beauty ("The Mute Beauty") Fadel finds another manifestation of the representational incapacity of language. Beauty has a sensory nature and appears as an experience that cannot be exhausted by its conceptual name. Language can indicate it, but it cannot turn it into an object of definitive knowledge, without losing what makes it beautiful – the spontaneous unity of the sensual and the mental, the conceptual and the non-conceptual. In this sense, it is not an image of something that language is supposed to represent, but a surprising event (Fadel emphasizes the moment of surprise) that goes beyond its possibilities of expression and reveals the limits of naming itself: "For it is not a thought, or at least not just a thought, but the attenuation of thought before something that transcends it: the world." (p. 49).

It is especially ingenious to observe that the best texts do not describe beauty and that it is for this reason that it is usually the subject of short forms (p. (This can also suggest a similar way in which beauty is only marked in folk tales – through the laconic "she was the most beautiful", sometimes supplemented by a comparison with the sun or moon.)

The translation and the original of Mandelstam's poem "Silentium" are not included as an illustration of the already derived thesis, but open a new field for reflection, in which individual translation solutions by Svetlozar Zhekov acquire interpretive significance (for example, the replacement of the heart with the soul shifts the emphasis from the sensory-bodily to the extra-sensory). More significantly, through Mandelstam, Fadel seeks the possibility of a different understanding of the word – not as a means of representation, but as an embodiment, event and being connection.

In Women's Poetry and Translation, one of the most provocative theses in the book appears, formulated as a kind of philosophical paradox: poetry does not simply use language as a means of conveying meaning, but resists it itself as a system of signs (p. Language, however, is thought of here not so much as a sign means of communication, but in its materiality – as sound, rhythm, intonation, verse length, etc. Poetry requires not only to be understood, but also to be heard and

felt. Hence the precise distinction between the semantic-oriented memory of prose and the memory of poetry, which may not be related to the understanding of meaning ("memory – remembrance" versus "memory – memorization").

Maurice Fadel finds real proof of this thesis in the translations between two great poetesses – Anna Akhmatova and Elisaveta Bagryana. Especially indicative is Bagryana's translation of Akhmatova's poem "You said I had no rivals". Fadel shows that in it Bagryana seems to unconsciously fit the foreign text to her own poetic "rebellious" identity. Thus, an essential feature of poetic translation stands out: the translator does not simply reproduce the foreign text, but refacts it through his own conception of the world. He can preserve the rhythm, the length of the poems and even the rhymes, but at the same time change their semantic and psychological dimensions. It is in this that Fadel sees the true meaning of the translation of a poet from a poet. In his polemic with Benjamin, he goes even further, asserting that both the poet and the translator "do not deal with language, but 'forget' it, depriving themselves of one of the most valuable attributes of the human, ceasing in any sense to be human beings, in order to be respectively a good poet and a good translator of poetry" (p. 75)

"Love for Nature" asks an even more unusual question: is it possible for a text to influence precisely through its meaninglessness, through its stupidity, rehabilitated as a form of spontaneity and "naturalness"? For Fadel, the nonsense, clichés and naïve rhymes in Ani Ilkov's poetry are not just flaws, but manifestations of "savagery" ("contrary to the human", p. 83) – liberation from rational control and socially constructed image of man, liberation of "speech" from "saying". In the historical context of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, this also acquires a political dimension – it turns into verbal "self-empowerment" against controlled "official" speech. It is in this resistance that Fadel recognizes the natural, ergo animal in "Love for Nature". Especially interesting is the transformation of stupidity into an aesthetic and political category. But who can afford to walk on the razor of nonsense – perhaps really only a poet like Ani Ilkov (I would add, also Konstantin Pavlov).

In Narrative and Meaning, Fadel shows how even the most meaningful genre, such as the fable, can escape its meaning (the moral). La Fontaine's fable often undermines its own moral message, elevating history above moral message: literature outwits philosophy. It is well said that allegories here become "ironies of allegories" (p. 98). Of course, we must note that this does not

apply to the same extent to Aesop's, also called "prosaic" (Potebnya), fable, in which the moral is clearly the primary element.

"Protocol Sentences" is the first text in the second part of the monograph – "Despite the language". In it, Fadel turns to the critical and poetic heritage of Atanas Dalchev, calling him one of the "few linguistically self-conscious Bulgarian writers" (p. 101), in order to trace the connection between the linguistic specificity of his work and the construction of his "literary personality" (M. Nedelchev). The starting thesis is that poetry does not just reflect reality, but participates in its transformation through the linguistic action itself. Although in his quest for concreteness and verifiability, Dalchev approaches logical positivism, the analysis of the poem "Stone" gradually shakes off such a convergence: tracing the movement from the dominant referentiality in the first verses, through the polysemy and metaphorical nature of the next ones, Fadel reveals the performative nature of the latter, which no longer reflect, but constitute a certain attitude towards it.

From here he takes the next step towards the comprehension of Dalchev's literary personality – not as a socially played role, but as an identity formed primarily through literary action (p. 111). This hypothesis is interesting, although the connection between the performativity of the text and the social identity of the author remains somewhat undeveloped. At the same time, the analysis reveals the productive tension inherent in the general title "Despite the language": literature cannot free itself from language, but it is not limited to its representative functions. It is precisely the possibility of thinking beyond its traditional reduction to signification and representation that outlines the perspective of Fadel's reading. That is why the conclusion of the chapter has a programmatic rather than a generalizing sound: it does not offer a definitive solution to the problem of language, but insists that it be posed in a new way.

And in the articles with the subject of Yavorov's poetry, "Representation and Power in Yavorov" and "Yavorov's Homeland", Fadel continues to explore the boundaries of linguistic representation, but from different starting positions. In "Representation and Power in Yavorov" he contrasts the figurativeness of the soul with the unpresentability of the self: the soul can be represented through images, while the self remains elusive to description, manifesting itself only as a force from which the expression itself derives. It is significant, however, that this force also needs linguistic representation in order to be recognized as a presence. In "Yavorov's Homeland" the problem is transferred to the relationship between language, time and identity. The reading

shakes the seemingly unproblematic identification of the homeland with the word and draws attention to the indefinite "it" in which different temporal intuitions intersect.

The unifying thesis of the two texts is that language cannot directly represent either the subject or the world, but it is precisely within its boundaries and in moments of hesitation of its representational possibilities that the power of poetic signification is discovered. In this sense, the two readings fit perfectly into the conceptual logic of "Despite the language": not as an attempt to overcome or leave language, but as an exploration of what in the literary text eludes unambiguous signification and exceeds the possibilities of linguistic representation.

In Art and Evil, Fadel examines the poetry of Konstantin Pavlov through the consistent undermining of the traditional foundations of artistic value: social utility, moral justification, beauty, glory, eternity, and the ability of art to guarantee the sovereignty of the artist. In the dialogue with Bataille, with which this text begins, he introduces the understanding of literature as an aimless and sovereign action, but shows that in Pavlov's case negativity goes even further: art not only remains devoid of affirmative grounds, but turns out to be capable of being destructive, aggressive, and becoming a source and producer of evil. Thus, the very border between art and anti-art, between the poetic and the non-poetic, is shaken. The paradox is that this self-destruction does not cease artistic action, but becomes its internal principle.

Fadel's final questions lead the analysis to a more general problem: from what instance does the text speak, on what basis does it rest, and from where does it derive its right to be recognized as art, since it undermines the very conditions of its own existence? Thus, the criticism of art also becomes a critique of the principles on the basis of which it constructs and legitimizes its own identity.

In "The Barbarian, the Slave, the Executioner" Fadel considers barbarism in Geo Milev not just as a modernist rebellion against traditional art forms, but as a radical negation of culture and civilization and, even more boldly, as a "call to leave the human" (p. 138). This call is argued by the idea of "shelter in the native", identified in the poet's metatexts with the "barbaric, subconscious, instinctive" (p. 138). Tracing the protection of rhythm, fragment, intuition and musical beginning in the same metatexts, Fadel checks this attitude in his reading of "September". There, barbarism, originally conceived as a liberating force, also reveals its destructive potential: the anger of the slave can bring him closer to the hated master, and the desire for liberation can grow into new violence.

A significant contribution to this reading is the problematization of the seemingly clear opposition between rebels and executioners. Fadel finds similarities in the ways in which the two sets are depersonalized, and in the animal and machine images through which they are represented. Thus, he calls into question the unequivocally utopian interpretation of the poem's finale. However, this interpretation also carries a risk: the formal similarity between the two sets does not erase the historical and moral asymmetry between the victim and the perpetrator of violence. Similarly, the thesis of the "slave's malice" is a productive philosophical hypothesis, but not the only possible explanation for the rebellion.

In Penyo Penev's Future Time, Fadel seeks the inner connectedness of creativity in his seemingly incompatible visions of the future – the utopian notion of universal happiness and brotherhood and the radical desire for emptiness in which there is nothing to lose. He traces the movement from the initial activist and performative poetry, which volitionally utters the future and seems to challenge it, to late reflexivity, shaking faith in the human ability to control life, history and time. Especially interesting is the reading of the technized utopia: the notion of the fusion of the natural and the technical gradually gives way to the vision of autonomous, non-human technology. Fadel finds the inner logic of this work not in the consistency of the author's convictions, but in the paradoxical closeness between the absolute positivity of the happy future and the absolute negativity of emptiness. This closeness is also manifested in the relationship between two different modes of poetic expression: the incantatory naming, which does not so much make sense of the future as it decrees it, and the reflective speaking, which fundamentally shakes the initial confidence. The power of reading lies in the revelation of creative integrity precisely through contradiction, and not in spite of it. In the last texts of the monograph, I will highlight only those accents that are relevant to the general theme. In "Old Age in Gerov" old age is not a thematic motif, but "the position from which his poetic voice addresses us" (p. 172). It becomes a space of self-sufficiency and alienation from the external – a reality, constructed, not represented, enclosed in the subject.

The irony in Liliev's Irony also reveals the instability of linguistic signification. Language does not function as a transparent intermediary between thought and reality, since what is said can contradict its own content. It is on such a discrepancy between what is literally said and what is actually signified that irony is based, defined as "unthinkable without the negative" (p. 175). Through it, the poet builds images that at first seem sensually concrete, but are subsequently

problematized and weakened. Fadel also assigns negative dimensions to musicality, insofar as it participates in the "overcoming of language" (p. 177). Particularly productive seems to me to be the connection he establishes between irony and religiosity, following a direction implicitly suggested by Kierkegaard.

Far from being intellectual, but also aesthetic pleasure is the text about Ekaterina Yosifova "Only Transparency". It reaches one of the most radical statements in the book – the possibility for poetry to free itself from the need to represent and signify. Transparency does not reveal a hidden meaning, but cancels out the very expectation of such. Among the supporting points in Yosifova's reading are the absence of figurativeness, of time, of memory and of the Self. It is as if her poetry is turned "towards the completion of the human", the author reflects without pathos. Even the voice of the lyrical subject seems to be "non-subjective", and if it can still be defined as a subject, it is insofar as it is the one who "transparentes" (p. 185).

In "Truth as Shock and Boredom", a text dedicated to Jonathan Littell's novel "The Benevolent", Fadel raises the question of the possibility of the unimaginable – the Holocaust – to be represented precisely through literature, accused of creating a fictional reality detached from reality. In this context, he analyzes the writer's narrative strategy through the intertextual prism of Charles Baudelaire's "Flowers of Evil".

A question before the concluding remarks: In various analyses, the boundaries of the human – that which runs counter to the human, lies beyond the human, or is devoid of the human – are frequently problematized. Is it possible to conceive of a more comprehensive conceptualization of the relationship between literature and the non-human?

Despite the diversity of authors and works to which it addresses, the book retains its conceptual unity thanks to the consistent development of its leading issues. What the individual readings have in common is the hesitation of the idea that literature simply reflects an already existing world. Rather, it reveals the limitations of the presentation itself, the instability of meanings and the impossibility of fully mastering reality through language.

Maurice Fadel's monograph really shows how it is possible not to "make" a theory without this implying a rejection of a theoretically conscious position. His adversarial approach turns out to be especially effective, in which he enters into a conscious collision with established interpretive models, including fundamental provisions of literary theory, in order to check their boundaries and

internal contradictions. His work confirms that Assoc. Dr. Maurice Fadel has long been prepared for the next academic step. With full conviction, I give my positive assessment and support his election to the academic position of "Professor" at New Bulgarian University.

09.11.2026 Prof. Svetlana Stoycheva, PhD