OPINION

on the scholarly works of Assoc. Prof. Moris Fadel, D.Sc.,

submitted for participation in a competition for the position of Professor in the field of

2.1 Philology,

announced in the State Gazette, Issue 65 / July 17, 2026

Assoc. Prof. Morris Fadel, D.Sc., is the sole candidate in the announced competition. He enters the competition with his study *The Broken Frame: The Destabilization of Representation in Literature*, as well as an impressive body of articles and scholarly papers published since he earned his Doctor of Sciences degree.

Over the years, the scholarly interests of Assoc. Prof. Morris Fadel, D.Sc., have been clearly defined—both through his numerous publications and conference presentations, and within the scope of his long-standing teaching career. Assoc. Prof. Fadel focuses his research primarily on 20th-century Bulgarian literature, approaching it with the depth and breadth characteristic of the literary historian, critic, and theorist alike – consistently demonstrating an innovative, fresh, and original authorial voice. The study presented for this procedure is a case in point.

The Broken Frame: The Destabilization of Representation in Literature opens with an introduction titled "The End of Literary Theory, the End of Representation"—a heading that sounds far more definitive, and perhaps even starkly hopeless, than the title of the book itself. Indeed, Maurice Fadel presents his readers with several ways in which major formalists in literary studies – such as Viktor Shklovsky, William Empson, and Michael Riffaterre – have, to use his own phrase, "challenged representation." He uses this to arrive at the entirely reasonable observation that "the failure of literary theory to move beyond representation is, in a sense, a failure of theory itself; after all, the struggle against representation constitutes a significant part of theory, providing it with meaning and purpose. Because of this failure, theory cannot fully realize itself; it is unable to attain the level of abstraction that would truly make it a theory" (p. 10). From this point,

the path toward Galin Tihanov's compelling thesis—formulated as *The Birth and Death of Literary Theory*—appears clear, unobstructed, and, moreover, the only logical route. Yet Maurice Fadel—who long ago, starting with his dissertation on Paul de Man, declared his affinity for literary theory and has consistently upheld it over the years—holds a different view. He is convinced that "the task for any future approach to literature would be to preserve the achievements of literary theory (following a critical assessment of them, of course) without, however, seeking to establish itself as a theory" (pp. 12–13). Assoc. Prof. Fadel envisions the means to accomplish this task—conceived in an indisputably positive, and thus decidedly non-macabre, manner regarding the future of literary theory—as follows: first, by moving beyond the confines of the Western literary canon, within which literary theory was originally formed; second, by avoiding the abandonment of the specificities of individual literary texts in favor of constructing abstract theoretical models; and third, by problematizing the very concept of literature through a "non-theoretical" approach. This is precisely the approach Maurice Fadel adopts in his new book, which examines the "problematization of representation" across various texts—all of which lie outside the Western literary canon—yet "never in an abstractly theoretical manner" (p. 13).

One cannot help but think that Assoc. Prof. Fadel's disbelief in the "death" of literary theory—and, indeed, the impulse behind his attempt to demonstrate its viability despite the "broken framework" (that is, stripped of any "pretension to establish universally valid propositions," p. 13)—draws its impetus, in a certain sense, from Paul de Man's famous credo. This credo is articulated in the rather optimistic conclusion to his seminal essay "Against Theory": "Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory, since theory is itself this resistance. [...] Literary theory is not in danger of dying; it can only flourish, and the more resistance it encounters, the more it flourishes, for the language it speaks is the language of self-resistance. What remains is the impossibility of determining whether this flourishing constitutes a triumph or a failure" (*American Literary Theory and Criticism*. Compiled, Translated, and Introduced by Albena Bakracheva, NBU, 2020, p. 110). It seems to me that it is precisely within this "impossibility" of choosing between two extremes—an impossibility posited by Paul de Man with such positive, categorical—and theoretical—assurance (and which, in fact,

affirms the “impossible” death of literary theory)—that Maurice Fadel manages to carve out his own “middle” path, one that upholds this very same, evidently undying, credo. In his study, he does not adhere to a binary system regarding literary theory (i.e., alive vs. dead, triumphant vs. failing, etc.). Instead—perhaps drawing inspiration from Michel Foucault—he adopts the premise that "binary oppositions are based on the principle of the excluded middle—that is, that a thing is either X or non-X" (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York, 1970, 142). Consequently, he chooses to "include" the middle: he maintains a critical focus on the achievements of literary theory while stepping outside the Western literary canon to concentrate on Bulgarian (and, to some extent, Russian) literature. He avoids constructing abstract theoretical models that stray from the specificities of the literary texts themselves, and he problematizes the very concept of "literature" upon which literary theory is built. In this way, the "broken frame"—from both a theoretical and a "practical"-critical perspective—successfully encompasses a series of excellent literary essays. Each one captivates the reader through the depth and keen observation of the skilled literary scholar, as well as through the wonderful language—often truly literary rather than merely academic—in which they are written.

Here, I would like to note that the "breaking" in the title and the "wavering" in the subtitle of Moris Fadel’s book appear synonymous, though in reality they are not—even though both are entirely related to "representation." For the "wavering of representation in literature" is not identical to the "endeavor [of literary theory] to move beyond representation" (p. 10); the failure of literary theory lies not in its inability to break free from representation itself (which is inherent to literature), but rather from the concept/ notion/understanding—of literature *as* representation, as *mimesis*. In other words, I am drawing attention to a matter of style—or, more precisely, a matter of phrasing – that could be refined. This is, in fact, my only critical remark—offered merely as a suggestion—and it pertains exclusively to the book’s preface. Beyond that, the work follows the "balanced" path chosen by the author, demonstrating a masterful command of theory, criticism, philosophy, and literary analysis as it unfolds an exquisite sequence of literary essays—each one more incisive and analytical than the last, and at times, even poetic.

And so, the “broken frame” proves to have far greater potential than an “unbroken” one; it manages to take in—to *take in*, rather than to *contain* (as containment is precisely not the objective here)—reflections on Yovkov, Bagryana/Akhmatova, Pushkin, Mandelstam, Dalchev, Yavorov, Konstantin Pavlov, Penyo Penev, Geo Milev, Al. Gerov, Liliev, and Ekaterina Yosifova, extending even to the laudatory verses dedicated to communist leaders. Morris Fadel elegantly organizes this motley array of authors and texts into two sections: “Against Language” (“literature’s resistance to sign-based representation”) and “Despite Language” (“countering representation through the very means of language itself”). Within these sections, the analyses of Yovkov and Dalchev, respectively, stand out as particularly representative examples. Given my familiarity with Moris Fadel’s interest in animal-themed literature—a focus notably articulated years ago in his book on Emiliyan Stanev—I found it both significant and intriguing to read his text on Yovkov’s *If They Could Speak*. In doing so, I sensed the underlying current of an inevitable and necessary comparison with Stanev. "In Yovkov’s work," Fadel notes, "the common stereotype—which holds that the animal realm is purely a domain of instinct (a view to which Stanev subscribes)—does not apply." He uses this point to highlight—both in the context of the comparison with Stanev and, more importantly, within the framework of his own new study—that Yovkov’s "animals serve as a unique extension of the human, albeit in a different, non-linguistic way" (pp. 30–32). Furthermore, as a long-time literary translator, I found Assoc. Prof. Fadel’s observations on the reciprocal translations between Bagryana and Akhmatova particularly compelling. I was also struck by his conclusion that when poets are translated by other poets, they touch upon "what 'memory-by-heart' [...] reveals: that poetry has less to do with language as a system of signs, and more to do with language as *matter*—that is, with the element within language that is not, in fact, language" (p. 74).

Despite my desire to do so, the strict constraints of a formal review prevent me from discussing every one of the excellent essays contained within the "broken frame" of this book. I must note, however, that the reader of this book will be richly rewarded by engaging with a literary-critical mind of such a high order—one brimming with culture and refinement.

I would also like to highlight the following: Associate Professor Morris Fadel, D.Sc., possesses extensive experience as a lecturer in the Department of Modern Bulgarian Studies at New Bulgarian University, where he has also served as Head of Department for many years. Most of the courses he teaches—at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels—are naturally aligned with his research interests, among which literary representation—and, specifically, realism in literature—holds a prominent place. Assoc. Prof. Fadel is a distinguished and respected figure in the literary sphere, both in Bulgaria and abroad; he has also served as the initiator and primary driving force behind many significant university seminars and conferences.

In conclusion, based on the points presented above, I would like to strongly recommend that the esteemed academic jury confer the academic rank of "Professor" upon Associate Professor Morris Fadel, D.Sc.

8.11.2026 г. Professor Albena Bakratcheva, D.Sc.