OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr Bilyana Kurtasheva
in the competition for the academic position of Professor,
Professional Field 2.1. Philology (Theory and History of Literature),
announced in the State Gazette, No. 65, 17 July 2026

Assoc. Prof. Dr Habil. Morris Fadel is a candidate in the announced competition for the academic position of Professor in Professional Field 2.1. *Philology*. His application is supported by a monograph, a series of publications, and his academic work as a whole over the past several years.

His monograph *The Broken Frame: The Undermining of Representation in Literature* was published by New Bulgarian University Press in 2025. Its inventive title is the key to an ambitious theoretical and historical undertaking: not merely to examine and demonstrate how literature destabilizes the reality to which it supposedly refers, but also how literary language, in turn, often cracks the fictional and lyrical worlds it constructs. In other words, the book explores how language, in its "poetic function" (to use Jakobson's term), sometimes turns against both reality and literariness. The individual sections focus on the blindnesses and insights of authors and works, as well as of their critical interpretations, past and present.

In many respects—its themes, its conceptual and methodological tools, and its style—the monograph brings together and crowns Morris Fadel's previous book-length studies. This book would not have been possible without the experience and discoveries gained through his earlier major studies: *Paul de Man: Experiments with the Impossible* (2002), *The Animal as a Literary Provocation: Emiliyan Stanev's "Animalism"* (2010), and *Detectives, Intelligence Agents, the Cold War: Crime and Spy Fiction in Comparative Perspective* (2022). The force of deconstruction, the focus on crime, and the question of the limits of the human constitute the core of *The Broken Frame*.

The book abounds in insights of genuine literary-critical originality. Particularly striking is the effect of "defamiliarization" achieved in relation to familiar, canonical texts, which suddenly appear in a new light. I will limit myself to three examples.

In the first section, "Against Language," Yovkov—and, more specifically, his short-story cycle *If They Could Speak* (pp. 22–44)—is read from a transhumanist perspective through the idea of unnamed telepathy. Telepathy proves to be the hidden core of the stories' most powerful moments: it is a telepathy of and among the subjugated the enslaved. The domestic animals, noble in their servitude, and the wise servant Uncle Mitush possess a form of knowledge and communication that transcends language. It is precisely this power beyond language that gives Uncle Mitush's point of view an invisible authority. In Morris Fadel's reading, even when the character dies, his perspective remains, and the narrator competes with it for dominance. More than that: perhaps this is why the narrator kills the character... (The critic thus becomes a metaliterary detective; this reading brings together, brilliantly, Fadel's two previous monographs.)

In the second section, "Despite Language," Geo Milev's poem *September* (pp. 131–154) is systematically "freed" from the facile ideological oppositions imposed upon it, allowing us suddenly

to discern a "suspicious similarity between the anger of the masters and that of the slaves" and, consequently, "the parallel dehumanization of the barbarian slaves and their executioners." Towards the end, the author raises a pertinent question: should we not read quite literally the initially degrading descriptions of the insurgent people, just as we later read the denunciations of those in power and the epic idealizations? More generally, how do we decide which passages in the poem to read literally and which figuratively?

Equally provocative is the reading of Liliev as an ironist (pp. 173–180), with regard both to his poetic virtuosity and to his relationship with religion. At first glance, this is a paradoxical thesis, yet it is substantiated through a deft comparison with Kierkegaard, a philosopher of both faith and irony...

It is not only Bulgarian classics that are at the centre of the study. The book also offers powerful and distinctive readings of Russian literature, as well as of contemporary world literature. I would particularly single out the interpretation of Jonathan Littell's novel *The Kindly Ones* (pp. 189–196). This merciless testimony to the Holocaust, presented through the eyes of a perpetrator and in many ways testing the limits of the human and of language, is read here with renewed radicalism and urgency in the light of the war in Ukraine.

The book demonstrates not only theoretical precision and imagination, and not only historical erudition, but also a bold philosophical aphoristic quality that reaches beyond the specific contexts under discussion. I have in mind memorable sentences that, I would say, "break frames," such as the following:

> "The overcoming of representation is one of the enduring dreams of literary theory. It could even be said that it is among the very conditions of its emergence." (p. 7)
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> "A person chooses a domestic animal for the same reason that they enter into marriage. (...) ...we prefer to regard our marital partner and the animal as subject to us, as bound by a form of power over living beings—a biopower that exists under the aegis of ownership." (pp. 27–28)
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> "The experience of beauty really does unfold rapidly, so rapidly that the factor of 'time' seems to have been eliminated. Beauty is the arrest of a moment." (p. 49)
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> "The soul is one of the few moments in Yavorov's poetry in which the body comes into view." (p. 113)

All this further underscores the significance and impact of *The Broken Frame* within a broader philosophical and literary field.

Beyond the monograph, Assoc. Prof. Dr Habil. Morris Fadel's academic work includes the compilation and editing of significant scholarly publications. Among these, I would single out the collection *History of Literature in the People's Republic of Bulgaria: Models and Practices* (2022, co-edited with Plamen Doynov), and the critical re-edition of *Bulgarian Versification* by Miroslav Yanakiev (2023). He has also published important work in scholarly collections and literary journals in Bulgaria and abroad. He is actively engaged in teaching and supervising students and doctoral candidates at New Bulgarian University.

The documents submitted demonstrate that the scientometric criteria for the present procedure have been met and even exceeded.

On the basis of all the above, I wholeheartedly support the candidacy of Assoc. Prof. Dr Habil. Morris Fadel in the competition for the academic position of Professor.

13 November 2026

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