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Abstract of the dissertation

“The Art of Reading”. The Axiology of Henryk Bereza’s Critical Literary Work

This dissertation offers a comprehensive analysis of Henryk Bereza’s critical legacy. The primary material consists of his reviews and essays, originally published in *Twórczość* and later reprinted in numerous collections, from *Sztuka czytania* (1966) to the posthumous *Alfabetyczność* (2018) and *Wypiski ostatnie. 2004–2012* (2020). The main research goal is to reconstruct the axiological portrait of the critic by examining the value system he applied both to literary criticism and to the literature he assessed. The methodological framework draws on literary and philosophical axiology.

The work is divided into five main parts. The first chapter provides a theoretical and methodological introduction, addressing key issues of the ontology and epistemology of values. It demonstrates the applicability of an inductive model of value systems, stresses the descriptive content of value judgments, and highlights the usefulness of axiology in analyzing literary communication among writer, critic, and audience. The second chapter outlines Bereza’s approved model of literary criticism, focusing on questions such as: What constitutes a text and a valuable critical reading? What should be the relation between critic and writer? What defines conscientious criticism and the duties of the professional reader? These issues are approached through Bereza’s axiological perspective.

The third chapter, the substantive core of the dissertation, concerns specifically literary values, arranged into oppositional pairs of values and anti-values. Importantly, the decisive criterion in Bereza’s criticism is the “truth of language,” understood as the unique truth of each creative subject, expressed through their literary diction and consistently developed artistic method. This criterion allows Bereza to question or transcend any binary opposition. The fourth chapter adds two crucial perspectives: a comparative approach to value judgments and the diachronic variability of Bereza’s critical practice, which resists static historical classification. The fifth chapter examines the debate on the “artistic revolution in prose,” a movement Bereza promoted but which ultimately failed. This case is interpreted as an axiological conflict between the dominant mainstream system of literary values and Bereza’s revolutionary vision of

valuable literature—a vision inevitably rejected due to historical necessity and Bereza's own axiological inconsistencies.

The outcome of the study is a theoretical model of literary criticism where value judgments are grounded in axiological a priori but also marked by diachronic variability, openness to revision, and a posteriori insights. The dissertation thus portrays Bereza as a critic both passionate, consistent, and conscientious in his readings, yet also receptive to artistic novelties that challenged even his own cognitive and axiological frameworks. One of the most significant conclusions is that Bereza sought, above all, another human being in literature—believing, as one of his principles stated, that true encounter with another person was possible only through the medium of authentic literature.

Keywords: axiology, Henryk Bereza, peasant prose, artistic revolution in prose, literary criticism