

In Search of Singularity: Simultaneous Readings from Polish in Chinese Poetry in the Era of Transformation (working title)

On 4 June 1989, when Poles were celebrating a victory of democracy, that is the first partially free election after over four decades of communist rule, Tian'anmen Square, the heart of China, witnessed one of the cruelest crimes in modern history of humanity which put end to democratic dreams of the Chinese nation. For both countries this date marks a symbolic beginning of a new stage in their respective histories. Although developing in radically different social-political and cultural environment, during the recent three decades Polish and Chinese poetry have shared many similar concerns and ambitions, which can be summarized as a “search for singularity” understood at three different levels.

First, the search for singularity means fervent discussions of the role, place, and shape of poetry in the dynamically changing local and global context. In Poland and China these discussions developed along very similar lines which is reflected in the biggest polemics on their local poetry scenes in the 1990s: between Classics and Barbarians in Poland and between Intellectual and Popular poets in China. These polemics had a double stake: establishing “power relations” within the respective national poetry discourses and negotiating the vision of national poetry as a whole so it could stand on its own and strengthen its unique, independent position in world literature based on its inherent qualities rather than on its dramatic history.

Second, it signifies poets' quest for their individual style within, against, or beyond the force field shaped by the mainstream polemics and developing their own specific ways of settling accounts with past and present, other people and themselves through poetry.

The third sense of singularity in my work is related to what scientists and engineers mean by this term when they speak e.g. of cosmological singularity or technological singularity, that is certain ultimate mysteries of humanity ranging from physical to metaphysical into which Polish and Chinese poetries consistently enquire.

I will have a closer look at selected works of around thirty authors from Poland and China, taking a perspective of what I tentatively call “comparative studies”. My focus will be then not as much on distinguishing, and drawing conclusions from, common or specific features of juxtaposed objects (here: Polish and Chinese poetry) through comparison as on possible added value that may stem from “simultaneous readings”, that is how such juxtapositions may

change our thinking, or enhance understanding, of poetry, of the relationships between life and writing, and of the world at large.