

JOHN ASHBERY AND ME

Bohdan Zadura

We talk in different places of different things in different languages
I have the advantage that I understand a few hundred of his words
whereas he can only guess at a few of mine We met
twice Once here once there So we're even

A few mutual friends A few mutual dead
At night the air outside the plane window over New York
is yellowbrown like the treetops in Włostowice cemetery on All Souls'
Day
the shining mist And limpid gin

He compared a train splitting the landscape open
to a zipper I know more than I can name
in this specific case since sometimes it's the opposite

I was never inclined to the avant-garde
I'd like to be understood well
I don't think this is a replica Nor a theft

BREAKFASTS IN THE BOOKSTORE

Bohdan Zadura

Staying at the Georgetown Hotel's the thing to do
so we do but eating here would be excessive
Each morning then a walk to the bookstore not far from French Square
where supposedly it can be dangerous Last year

homosexuals danced here every evening on roller skates
Irena says The mornings are brisk
The coffee and croissants those strange rolls
empty inside crisp and warm

on which among maps prints and glossy magazines
the butter melts and blackcurrant jam
inclines us to be cheerful

Mister Life's Movies continuously offers
a single film the same one so in order not to flop
it has to keep changing its audience That's why some are born and
others die

A NEPHEW'S SNAPSHOT

Bohdan Zadura

Something must have bitten him At breakfast
at dinner during supper In the middle of a sentence
No one would have known he was asleep but for the snoring Auntie
seemed masculine Maybe because they never had children

Bees were buzzing in the mallow Uncle's coma
was turning the yard into a piece of an African village
and this is how it looks in the photo The cowshed wall
yellowish rusty limestone clay and shutters made of reeds

Even those kids with bellies bent like bows
which they hold in their hands aiming at a cloudless sky
and tobacco drying under the thatch like exotic fruit

Something's missing in the snapshot The steamship on which he'd
come
There are horseflies But you can't see the tsetse fly that buzzes
hidden in the little cord's spring which releases the shutter

OLD FRIENDS

Bohdan Zadura

If it's not about describing
but about changing This onion for instance

does not describe the world rather surrounds
itself layer after layer
husk after husk

undressing it I find
nothing which it encloses
and protects

under the innermost skirt
nothing is hidden

but the onion turns the whole world into onion

Why am I talking about onion? Because of
these tears of yours which however
describe us more than change us

OVEREXPOSED PHOTOGRAPHS

Bohdan Zadura

The sky's depth can only be seen on a plain —
acquaintances coincidences clouds stars
plants similar and yet slightly different and birds
more trusting or maybe only sleepier

If there are aseptic days
in the sense of spotless and watering the lawn
you don't frighten off the starlings and at any moment you might
place a rainbow in the grass

it wouldn't be pointless to ask When
and how you'll pay for it Or who Since nothing's free
There must be something to it if moments

mimic eternity A poem is patient
That's true But not a mule However hard
you drive it it won't bear everything