

And Thou

1978

In the wattle trees outside the squatters' hut
in what was then Rhodesia
something shimmered: paradise

flycatchers' brilliant orange tails. Inside,
bellies like balloons of stone
and a Ndebele woman

with her hands out, palms up. I cradled one child
of air who twirled my hair
round and round her finger

and when the woman offered me
a glass of water, I shifted that daughter
from one hip to the other.

The Wanderer

A gathering of shapes with little nests
of ambiguous *ands* quickens into partial geometry:
squares of greenish-yellowish blue. Wrought-iron

patio furniture seems to exhibit neither the curvature
of old, nor the smell of peppermint earth. Whereas
she used to say, surely, “The mail is early today,”

or “See the swallows skimming the water,”
now she wanders into what is merely beyond,
a fact herself in history, still yielding

heart, lung, eyes, but omitting necessarily
that sunrise in her brain wherein the vaguest self
follows a trail of scent through the trees.

The Marianne Moore House

Balsa wood cut with an X-acto knife
for the roof and walls,
an oval mirror
inside a pocketbook her mother used

for the pond beyond the door, reflecting
one dragonfly (from
cellophane wrappers),
one *Bufo Americanus*. On this

side of the pond, copper-wire vines shape three
birds of paradise,
under which lesser
birds may build their nests, screeching like hellions

if you come too near. On the other side,
spheres of goats-beard like
dandelion clocks,
each a diaphanous globe, contract to

four exact dots. . . . Hinges painted flat black
are for looks only,
the door stays closed—not
everything can lead to more—but inside

the painted glass heads of dressmaker pins
open drawers stuffed to
the gills with ori-
gami fish, a true bone armadillo

shell, pale blue aerogrammes, letters to the
world, stamped in her life-
time! and transparent
veils with patterned selvage that does not fray.

Missouri Grandfather

Except when he stopped for a sandwich
or closed the barn door on shadows
raised up by the sun, he spent the hours

on his tractor, and when he stepped down
from the rear axle, jelly legs shaking,
the silence engulfed him, the humidity

of late afternoon all but smothering the turning-over
of the engine and the shushing of the radiator,
neither crow nor pick-up truck obliterating them—

it's like holding your breath under water, he told her,
peace and quiet inside and out at the same time—
until he heard again the almighty buzzing of summer:

mosquitoes, grasshoppers, deerflies, and the crunching
of ground juniper under his feet. The walk uphill
back to the house was just long enough for life to return

with his mother asking him if he wanted milk tonight
or sweet tea, and is okra okay?
They hadn't had okra in a good long while.