



The jar, placed where it was, was gray
and bare, like dominion.

Nothing sprawled, and nothing wild
was or rose around.

I was gray and wild and upon
the hill, upon that slovenly, round
nothing, and it was bare.

Nothing took dominion, and nothing
made the wilderness give.

What nothing took was nothing like it
was, and was like a jar.



Everywhere dominion.

Everywhere Tennessee.

Everywhere the hill, sprawled.

Everywhere the jar, the ground it took.

Everywhere sprawled, no longer nothing.

Everywhere bare, I rose, slovenly and
made slovenly.

Everywhere "I": a port in a wilderness
upon a hill.



In the port of a jar, the jar did not give
dominion, or surround everywhere. It
was placed. It did not surround nothing,
in that it was not everywhere. That
port was like the no longer bare
wilderness. That port was a jar. I
placed it, the jar that was a hill. In the
jar, I rose up everywhere. Like a wild
and round dominion. Or like a tall "I."

The Cumberland Refractions, being 26 variations on the American Klee's too, too distilled "Anecdote of the Jar," were never intended to be sealed in any book. I conceived them, if indeed I did, as a sort of libretto: improvised, over the course of many years of coterie palaver, in my frequent and frantic casting for the perfect allusion, one that would bolster some outrageous claim or might stand as unimpeachable witness in the latest of our spasmodic disputes. And the actual words were what I wanted in those moments, not this flailing ("I mean... I meant...") aria, sung in the tongue that made me a bastard, on the garbling of misremembered selves. Not this disarrangement of greenhouse and garden, this disposal of seaside and bowl of paper flowers. I will pass unparaphrased. Order is vandalism; vandalism is genius; genius is intelligence at the apex, the utmost superior extremity, of its artificiality; and artificial intelligence is a mouth quite wide-open.

— E. B.



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