

KLAUS HØECK

Fairytales

With 1000 drawings by JØRGEN BISPELUND KNUDSEN

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to my mother

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Robert Frost

THE WOODS
(death)

the woods stood black behind the
summer in behind their own
words as if the seven stones of
orion lay gutted in their midst

should we enter from the north
here where wormwood stood smoking at the
wood's edge after the sun's great ordeal by fire
and the weeds flowered only for their maker?

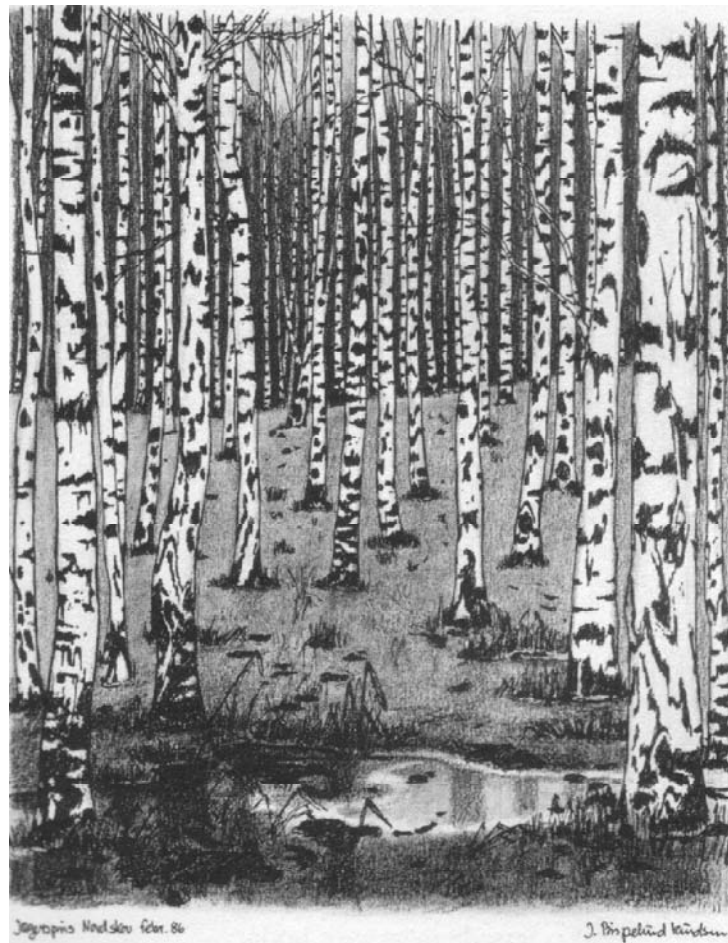
the pine trees were darker
than usual
it was as if they
had come straight out of
‘des knaben
wunderhorn’
but at their base
the brambles
gleamed more wildly than ever
as if
christ himself had lost
his crown of thorns just there

the oak trees also seemed to us
to be different
in their enclosure
(behind the shadows
a little to the left of
the night) with their
curled leaves of iron
eaten away by
the gall fly’s bladders
their colour reminded us
more of rigor mortis
than anything romantic

the beech tree though
looked like itself
glittering with tin
beneath the shooting stars
this st. laurentius
evening – the beech
tree calmed us
like a backdrop in
a german opera
for a brief instant
at the entrance to
the poems of the dark

in the sycamore
a crow was sitting
in the sycamore that
did not grow in language
a crow was sitting
that did not sit in
the fairytale that did not
exist in the wood
that did not grow
in the poem – where did
the crow then fly when it
took to the air above our heads?

we did not want
to be caught again
in the windfalls of
language (the pine trees that
lay crosswise
like toppled crucifixes)
we did not want
to stumble over the words
yet again (the octopus
tentacles of the tree stumps
right in the poem)
we wanted to be invoked



even so the words
sprang up around us in
the quincunx of the
birch trees like mushrooms
words we only
understood now so
many years after
we had learned them
by heart from the
books on fungi words
like st. george's mushroom
for example

the summer traced
its track of moisture
through woods and
poems its snail trails
out onto the other
side of time
and we knew that we
were not going to find
the elm trees in their
magic square
before all
the leaves had withered



look – i said
to you – the willow
trees are standing
in a circle around
the heart just
as in fairytales
but we had
not forgotten that
every fairytale
only exists
is only told so as
to do away with itself

once again we had spread out the pieces in the
woods of reality and the rugosa hedges of
the imagination either by chance or so that
the game could start all over again
and now were looking for a particular piece
red-lead coloured as the sky in one of
constable's most famous landscape paintings

instead we found another fragment:
the first fallen leaf of the lime tree
yellow as a scar in the soul
and we entered between shostakovich's
first and second cello concertos
to listen to
the trees from our own youth

august turned to the left into it
self like a snail's shell followed
the fractal mathematics of its own formula
in around the season's rusty thorn
and we followed without wavering these grimy
traces that led from the fieldfires
into the wood's eternal repetition

was it also the soul's own motion we thus
described withershins here
where the rosebay had finished its flowering
with its bristling clock springs (the rosebay
that had filled us with so much purple)
or was it really only a word in
the poem's enclosure we now analysed in reverse?

summer clouds still above the fortress of the
pine trees i let this engraving
represent the day when I crossed over
to you on a strand of a cobweb
my beloved because i knew that every
fantasy loses its meaning without reality
no matter how fragile the bridge across may be

i held on tight to reality with these
words: quercus robur quercus borealis
'inside the oak tree the wood-king lives'
you replied – just to point out
to me that every reality also
loses its meaning without fantasy
no matter how strange the path inward may be

the sixteenth piece looked as follows:
foxmarked at the edges and wet with rain
and bitumen – pine cones crisscrossed
like a game of pickupsticks – it looked like a
teeny island and smelled sour like sperm
we placed it here in its exact position
in the poem collection's herbarium

we entered the shadows whose patterns fell
across the paths like the vignette letters in
the big books of fairytales – though we let
these signs be – we did not make any attempt
to interpret fantasy but reality and hoped
that in return it one fine day would shed
its light (from the tall beech trees) into the poems

did the wood really look like that beneath the muzzle
smoke of the sunset like the battle of
austerlitz or was it once more just
fancy that was playing a trick on us?
was it perhaps ultimately only the words
that could not contain all that purple
and so crackled like golden-age paintings?

no touch of romance no waldeinsamkeit
no piano quintet in A major could
compare with the wood right here where
the path turned down past the two stacks of
firewood and disappeared into the crystal-violet
of its own darkness among the nouns:
mixed deciduous trees and pine plantation



the moonlight fell in large squares over the floor
of the wood forming a chessboard
in front of our feet as we now stood there
observing this age-old scene
we would almost resemble the black king and
queen if someone were to observe us at a
distance from behind – caspar david friedrich for example

foxglove – foxglove ring your bells for us
one chime for pain two chimes for
death and three for the love that heals them
both – we did not say aloud to each other
but listened only to the refrain as in fairytales
because just this morning and for the
first time we saw digitalis purpurea

for a while we now followed certain consonants
more than the compass so as to avoid
the all-too straight lines of reason we went from
elder bush to elder bush rather than
directly recalling the motto of the
poet: 'krump ist nicht schlecht' – we
tried to spell our way to a language not yet understood

or we skipped from stone to stone on the
dried-out bed of the lake at skarresø
(was it the small white heartstones of folklore
that were now becoming vowels in this poem?)
to put together again the mosaic that
once in other legends had represented
the image of what we now referred to as 'true love'

the twenty-fourth piece strangely enough hung on
the wall in the old inn that adjoins
the open fields between the prewood and the westwood
the twenty-fourth piece was a watercolour by
albrecht dürer with the name 'das grosse rasenstück'
manna rye and orchard grass – as far as we could see
the twenty-fourth piece was square – now it hangs here

even though the rowan berries were redder than ever
(what was it now that signified?)
it was the common oak that indicated autumn
the rusty brocade of its crown lent it
this enigmatic aura that always surrounds what
is imminent with a halo (almost as in
these russian photographs of demi-leaves)

what was it that was missing in the bottom
righthand corner – was it olive-green or elm
would one expect large-leaved elm precisely there on
this last day of summer? it was like having to
remember something that had never happened – like
imagining one's mother's death though she was
still alive among the pen-and-inks of esrum lake

we studied our surroundings thoroughly in order
to perhaps thus find an answer: we thought that
we could make out noble fir in the background
through the picture's thin layer of varnish
mountain pine in the middle ground violet with dust
rain in behind the words – the riddle was solved
it could only be a question of: hazel thickets

we also saw the common heron fly out like an
allegory of another poem and into this one
but no – there it screeched more than interjections
can bear – there it screeched louder than
language – there it spread its wings like re
flections out over this page's albedo
there it flew further that writing reaches

edges of woodland behind more distant edges faded
in greener colours than green lost themselves
in dictionaries that no one knows and no one can
read without dying – edges so green with
crushed emeralds that only a memling could
have painted them on one of the rare days in
his life when he doubted god

september mirrored itself in itself in its own
woodland lake whose surface was only slightly
rippled as if a very high note from shostakovich's
violin concerto had stroked it and even though
we knew quite well it was an illusion we became
intoxicated even so in this high romanticism let ourselves
for a brief moment be the dupes of the dark's delusion



in the great reference works the woods also stood almost more real than out there in reality in various encyclopedias the woods were described as 'typically danish beechwood' or 'wealth of ash' in the books the woods stood immobile – on the white paper they themselves had chipped in on the woods stood in two dimensions and often in four-colour print

we studied these white-paper sheets thoroughly to
get as close to reality as possible
placed you could say words and images like a ruler
along the woodland paths so we when we saw a
particular tree could really say: 'white poplar'
“see for yourself how image and
word almost cover reality”

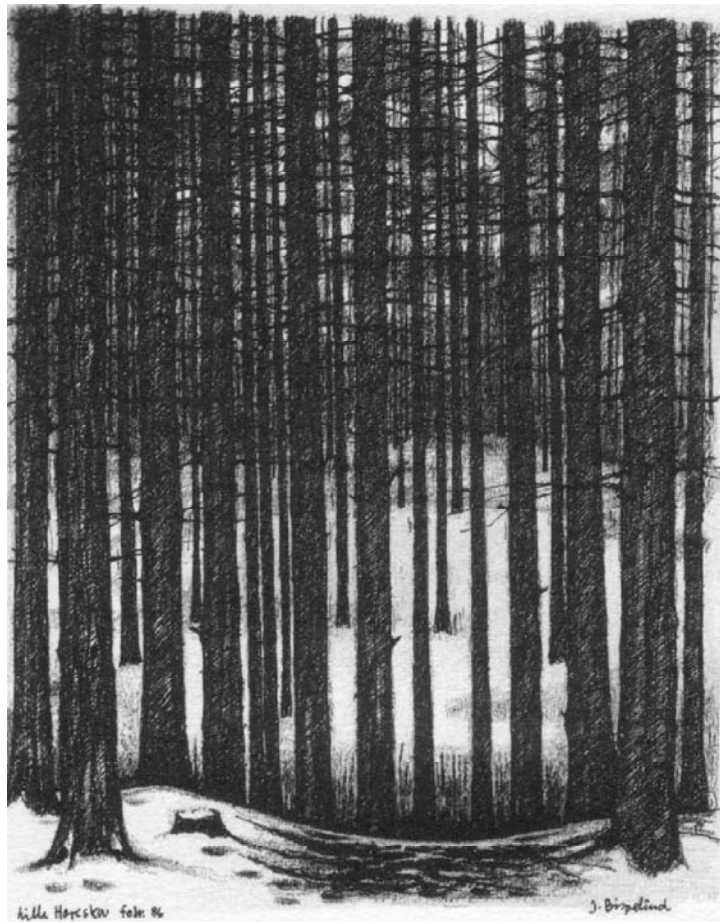
one day we could get so close in a plantation
with new vegetation that we found a
picea abies (common spruce) round whose trunk
was a sign on which it actually said:
picea abies – but there was still distance – for
this of course wasn't a natural picea abies
but a picea abies with a nameplate on it

so as to be able to name this picea abies precisely
in a similar way we therefore had to wind
a second sign round its trunk that bore the words:
picea abies with a sign that bears the words picea
abies – and once more we had to attach a new sign to
the trunk that bore the words: picea abies with two
signs that bear the words... and so on ad infinitum

now all we had to do was imagine that our namings
were such signs attached to things (and that
is of course exactly the stance we adopt towards reality)
and then it was clear that language and reality could
never become one – it would become clear that we
would end up in endless reflections if we assumed that
the last millimetre from words to things was insuperable

then we could calmly return to the distance
 between them and the abyss where fairytales grow
and the poems as bridges that take us across
 then we could safely once more proceed among
the sleeping beauty castles and bitter-sweet nightshade
 because the words only gained meaning at a
certain distance from so-called reality

therefore we read on undaunted in "walden"
 (the wind that blows is all that anybody knows)
while the wind blew through the pine corridors
 and the light began to wane outside in nature
while unknown birds flew low over sønder strand
 and over woods we as yet had no words for
the night my mother reached the age of seventy-seven



and we heard the rain fall on the
fifth of september
we heard the rain
beating down like a tattoo
through the foliage on
the forage house's corrugated
iron roof – we heard the rain
of the dead like a drum-roll
between our words
we heard the rain's drum beat deep
in "the woods" by max ernst

we had reached the third circle
in behind its flaming
sea of nettles
(the first circle was guarded by the
wormwood and the second
circle was ruled by
the fluff of thistles that drifted
from hell) – what was our
business here behind the
strict verses where not even
death ruled in the scrub of words?

it was like travelling in a poem
by carsten hauch
where for example
one could well read: “wherefore
do you stand so lone
some oh birch” – even
though the birch wood here was dense
and impenetrable
and the foliage glistened
like gold leaf in another
legend told a long time ago

if we were to continue to roam
from poem to poem
through artificial
moonlight which only fell on
the paper if we
kept on letting
the one word grasp the next one
where then would we
end up – in
what obscure sonnet would we
then finally lose our way?

if we constantly were to tread
“so many a wild path”
through the willow scrub of
the folk song would we not
finally lose each
other my beloved
if we incessantly were to thrust
deeper and deeper
into the brushwood of
myths would we not ultimately be
caught in the unicorn’s enclosure?

if we were to continue to
wander on the “irr
und holzwege” of
the fairytales among the
enchanted alders –
if so to speak
we decided to give reality
a miss would we
then not end
up in shostakovich’s last
adagio rather than in the woods?

but perhaps the woods were some
thing else and more
than what was standing
out there in nature’s arsenals
perhaps the woods
were not just a matter of
taking a walk in grib forest and
registering facts – perhaps
the woods were not
at all immediate reality but a
far greater and open reality?



perhaps the woods were a place in
the memory or
a place where i at some
point was going to take leave of
my mother – perhaps
the woods were a
place that did not exist because
they were always
present in some
way or other perhaps as a part of
the whole they actually composed?

perhaps the woods were a puzzle
with two hundred
and fifty-six
pieces that did not fall into
place until my
mother was dead
perhaps this poem was one of
the pieces perhaps
this poem was
a hexagram that could not be made out
until “the woods” were finished?

nevertheless we continued
along the rugosa hedge from
a poem that we both
remembered to one that only i
knew because i myself
had written it once
in my youth: “inhidden in a murked
shadow in its detain
ing smell of ink and car
bolic and mushrooms angled head in
clined over the secret” – it said

what i wonder had i meant by that?
it still had the
appearance of a
secret – why did we seek out
this mysterious
place where time
had not passed so many years
on? – perhaps so
as to find some
consolation in the timeless that held
out in here among the words?

we pushed further into september
into poems that i
had only envisaged
writing sometime or had torn
into shreds – in there
where we still
had not listened to russian
string quartets
in there where the
last words faded away like
firewood smoke among the birch trunks

could you follow me my beloved
among these
fragments which
lay like ripped-off wings of tiger
moths – could you
follow me in here
where the word 'pine' related
more to other
words than to the
pine trees of reality – or would
i have to continue alone?

i hoped that my love would be able
to make a bridge over
the abyss that
the words had created to the woods
of reality – the
bridge that was so
fragile that only the ants could
otherwise cross it
i hoped that these
words: 'i' – 'love' – 'you' would lead
you safely across the ashes of the abyss

and the fifty-second piece was a
mirror in which
we could see nothing
saw no evening star rise behind
the woods – we saw absolutely
nothing in this mirror
clouded over with mists that we
constantly tried
to wipe clean
because we knew that only this mirror
could dazzle the powers of the dark

we had followed another sun-ray
than the one that fell
here among the beech
trunks lighting up the treasure chests
of the woodland floor and
for the time being we had
ended up in a language that did
not exist at all except
in the romantic theories
of language (a so-called natural language)
e.g. “Über den Ursprung der Sprache”



the distance was now so great – we
had come so far into
the woods now that
we doubted whether it really
was the great bear
we could see there like
an open jewel case above the
silhouette of the fir trees
or whether it was
rather something that only took place
between the lines like a myth

or were the stars gleaming in there
behind the words? – was there
also a reality on
the far side of language that
was just as
unutterable as
the very reality we were
entering here where
the road ended and
only a path continued among
the poplars – here where writing gave out?

we had reached an area of
the woods which for the
time being had to be lacking
since as yet we could not find
words for it – on
the cadastral maps
this area was medium green and
marked as coniferous
wood with small crosses
but for us it was more of a white
enclave that lay within the soul

we looked at other signs on the map:
‘water mill’ for
example or
‘earthwork with stone wall’ or
‘hedgerow’
and ‘magnetic
north’ – ‘firebreak’ – but
these words were
also unable to help
us to a deeper understanding of
what the woods actually were

we also attempted to introduce our
own coordinates
on the map – ‘lightning’s
parabola’ or ‘oak thicket’s
cream of tartar’ – ‘the trident
of darkness’ et
cetera – but these words
and concepts were
of no use at all
here on the slopes of the mind where
twilight was just igniting in the foliage

what did shostakovich's seventh
string quartet have
to do with the woods
apart from the fact that we listened
to it over and over
in the small hours
when we had returned from the woods
what did it have
to do with the woods
more than the first quartet
which we had never listened to?



one day when we had been in that part
of the woods near tissø
we read the poem
'hymnen an die nacht' in the evening
but more than that –
we corrected certain
words in the poem (i do not intend
to state which) changed
certain metaphors
to do with the word 'abschied' – why
did we commit this sacrilege?

some other day i took shostakovich's
eighth quartet
down from the shelf and
stuck black glossy paper all over
the record cover
i then placed a
graphic illustration of lein
weber in the middle of
the black square and
finally replaced this with a
photo i myself had taken of northwood

what was it i was trying to hide
why was i covering
over works of art
with art and other pictures
was perhaps it in such
a way that we related
to reality out there
in nature – covered it
over with art and an
other so-called more real reality
was it in such a way we saw the woods?

rewritings of this kind (as
when asger jorn
altered older
paintings) were they really any
thing different than such
directly referring
words as for example 'silver fir'
was every poem
every work of art
not such a rewriting of the woods
pushed to its logical conclusion?

what we meant was that we did not
get any closer to nature
or to the woods
by writing the word 'oak tree'
than by writing
'oak tree by
caspar david friedrich' because
the woods were precisely
much more than
the fiction of pure nature – put
together out of many more pieces

perhaps though there was a far sim-
pler explanation to
these overlappings
these collages in black and green
perhaps these
digressions along
unknown woodland tracks were due
to the simple fact that
my mother lay dying
in the wood of her own childhood – there
where the dog roses blossom for all eternity

perhaps it was precisely this small
wood we were looking for in there
behind this tangle of enchanted roses
this small wood which we knew
had to exist in the
much larger area
of the woods – perhaps i was looking
for precisely this
small tract of woodland
where the roots intertwined
because mother and son are of one flesh and blood

we quickly crossed over via a
poem by højholt
full of moist
mountain pine while recalling
his jigsaw-puzzle
text – even though
our own inspiration came
more from a
fragment of novalis:
'vor der abstraktion ist alles eins
nach der abstraktion ist wieder alles vereinigt'



because the words now practically only
pointed inwards – not
at themselves – but
farther in behind hölderlin's
last hymns because
the words like a
compass needle were now pointing directly
at grief they were
becoming
just a heavy and incomprehensible as
granite and the flintstones on the woodland tracks

we had to correct the distance once more
if our own poems
were not to become
palimpsests to become blackboards
with incomprehensible
chalk crosses on
if our own poems were not to
end in languages we did
not even understand ourselves
the inner error was not any less
than the outer – merely a different one

the words then were pointing on
the one hand at things
outside – at a lark
for example – and on the other
hand they were pointing
inwards at feelings
pain for example – and the
more we in-
creased the outer
distance the more we shortened
the inner distance and vice versa

which meant that the closer we placed
the words to their
outer objects – sil
ver birch – for example the more
they lost in intensity
and the further we
removed them the more they lost
in intelligibility – the
converse would
apply to the relation of the words to their
inner references – melancholy – for example

when we had realised this it was
obvious that we
had to try to get out
into the openness between these two
positions which
in this particular
case meant that we had to
find a quite
specific clearing
deep in the woods a specific
glade between words and rugosa scrub

a secret place which neither existed
in the mind nor in nature
nor in language
but only in the poem because only the poem
linked inner
and outer real
ity together with the aid of language
a secret place
with the distant
barking of dogs and death blowing
more beautifully than ever on its waldhorn

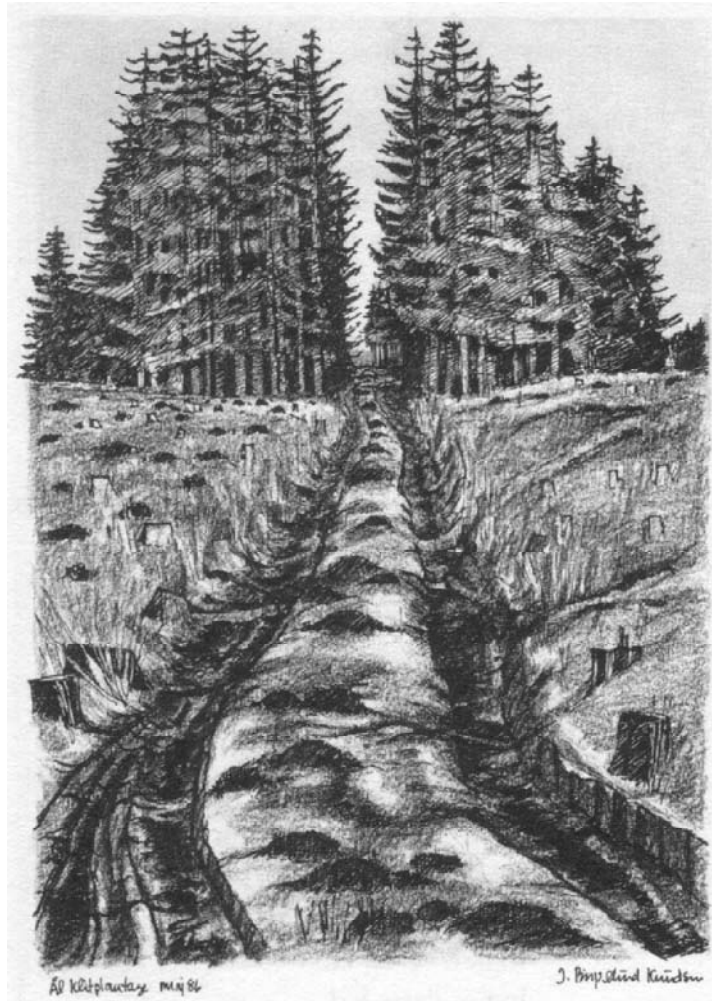
perhaps it was only imagination but
we felt that this
insight had something
to do with the fact that the equinox
was right now describing
its green circle
around these days in september
(as if they lay
bathed in aqua regia)
because balance was the key that
fitted autumn's jewel case

piece number seventy-five turned out
to be this
poem here on this
page – a poem that on closer
inspection turned out
only to refer
to its own chinese box
of words that
pointed to
'words' that only pointed to "words" in
an endless spiral into "the woods"

we went and stood under the tree and
said "little tree
i beg of thee
shed gold and silver down on me"
and the birch tree shed
its leaves which
were more beautiful than any gold
smith could have
fashioned them
the birch tree shed its leaves because it
was late september and the time was ripe

the first autumn gale blew up
just as much in our
minds as in the nykobbel
woods which stood there darker than
per kirkeby's masonite
pictures as backings
in the poem and it was only
the sharp smell
of burial rather
than of turpentine which revealed that
we were still out there in nature

it was only when we had listened
to shostakovich's twelfth
quartet twelve
times that we understood the nature of
the chestnut tree – yes
that's how it sang
in the tree top (like october) yes that's
how the roots sounded truly
full of darkness
and sodium – yes that's how the
chestnut stood on guard at death's gate



the picture now seemed to look like this
as far as we were able to
interpret it here in
the twilight of st crispin's eve:
blue spruce behind white spruce
(no it could not be
that – white spruce mainly grows in
canada) blue spruce
behind red spruce and a
bird frozen in a hundredth of a second
in the middle – it had to be a colour photo

but once again nature caught us unawares
when you entered the
picture my beloved
to pick an autumn bouquet
of chicory camomile
and various sweet
grasses – for at that moment the
bird flew up leaving
us with this sound
recording: cucuroo – because it was a
cock pheasant with a head like a pavilion

as we stood by the naked dead
spruce trees what
disturbed us was
not so much that reality
was changing
(and not at all in
nature where other spruce trees that
resembled the dead ones
like spitting images
would grow again) but the fact
that language itself was changing

nor did the fact that we
ourselves were changing
(our thoughts and
entire mentality) so utterly that
one fine day we would
be gone completely – it
was not that which disturbed us
all that much but
the fact that language
itself was sliding just like the feelings
we so blindly relied on

for when language itself yielded to
the pressure of time like
the woodland floor we
were standing on (where ochre and humus
were mixed to all
eternity) what was then
the eternal to mirror itself in – strike down
into – reveal
itself in – how
would language then be able to contain
the only begotten light of the unchanging?

this was of course only a re
formulation of the
well-known question:
how could language describe
the world in its
totality when language
itself was a part of the world? – or
how could language
contain itself? – and
the answer was just as obvious: that
it could only do so in the midst of the poem

because the poem's secret place as
the darkest was
illuminated by the paradox
as the lightest – because light and
dark were reconciled
in the midst of the poem
as could sometimes on certain good
fridays be experienced
deep in the woods when
finitude and infinity inter
sected in the rosebushes

the woods were beginning to smell
strongly of graphite like
newly sharpened pencils
(go out into oak scrub on saint
michael's day and
convince yourself of the
truth of this statement) the wind
was blowing in b flat minor
and i loved you so
dearly that the word 'sacrilege' now had to be
considered as part of our language usage

the log cabin of fables also presumably
lay somewhere or
other deep in
the october woods even though we had
last seen it
in an etching by
vielfaure and in another poem
among eroded words
or was it only
found in the fairytales that were
written inside behind its decayed timber?

october rose up black like a
rook in the queen's
gambit in front of us
while distant lightning leapt between
two brass balls
lighting up the
sixty-four squares where we were playing
against death where we
were trying to check
mate it in a particular variant of
the emanuel lasker defence



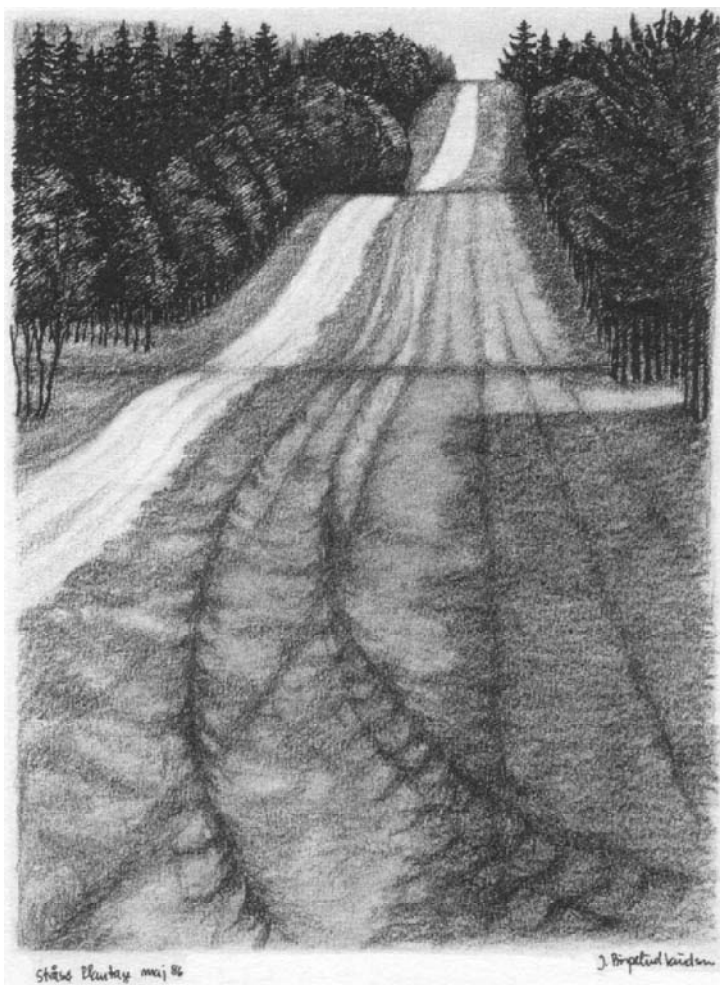
the more the picture was put together
the more indistinct did it
appear to us – as if
we were too close to be able
to perceive the woods in
their entirety (as with
death or with love) perhaps we were
only able to recognise
piecemeal and as in a
mirror – perhaps it was a mistake
to put together this great jigsaw puzzle?

or perhaps it was due to the picture
having become too
unambiguous it could
for example turn out to be
harald giersing's
'forest clearing' or
even more concretely the photograph
we took in jægersborg
enclosure of the hawthorns and
such a one to one interpretation
the woods were precisely unable to contain

conversely a single picture was
unable to contain
the woods (whether it
be raupp's 'sonntag im walde'
or a painting by
søndergaard) because
the entirety would shatter into
tiny fragments
if it attempted
to press itself into itself
like the last piece in a work of art

perhaps it was the tragedy of
art itself we were
approaching: that at the
very instant a work of art wanted to express
its entirety it had
to splinter like
the glass that is full of its own note:
that every work of art
was such an
attempt to gather the fragments or
glue them together to make a new whole?

it had got late – we did not
get any closer
this time round
other words were waiting for us deep in
the hazel thickets
words we were going
to join together into another whole
ness that was also
unable to contain
itself in the poem that therefore in turn
had to be put together in another poem



i stood facing
the pine wood's gleaming
darkness as when for the
first time i was about to listen to
shostakovich's fourteenth quartet –
hesitatingly because
i knew that a great farewell was waiting
for me in there in
the rusty adagio – i stood
facing the wood's contradictory
darkness knowing
that at least one
fairytale was over

the fourth cycle
drew its megaric
circle of questions
round me: how many trees were
needed to make a wood – when did
did a group
of trees make up a grove – when
did a grove
become an enclosure and an
enclosure a wood – how many pieces
was i still missing
painted with
autumn's dog roses

every fairytale is
created at the wave
of a wand – and
i had likewise attempted to shape
my life by the magical power
of decision
i could either give the fairytales
life or i
could turn life into the only
fairytale at the wave of a wand
that would cause
the woods to
glitter with stardust

and it was
such a fairytale
that was on the point
of ending now deep within the
woods of christianity where my mother
lay dying
it was the fairytale of fairytales
that was shedding
its leaves of gold and silver over
me like a final benediction
a final
gleaming wave
of death's wand

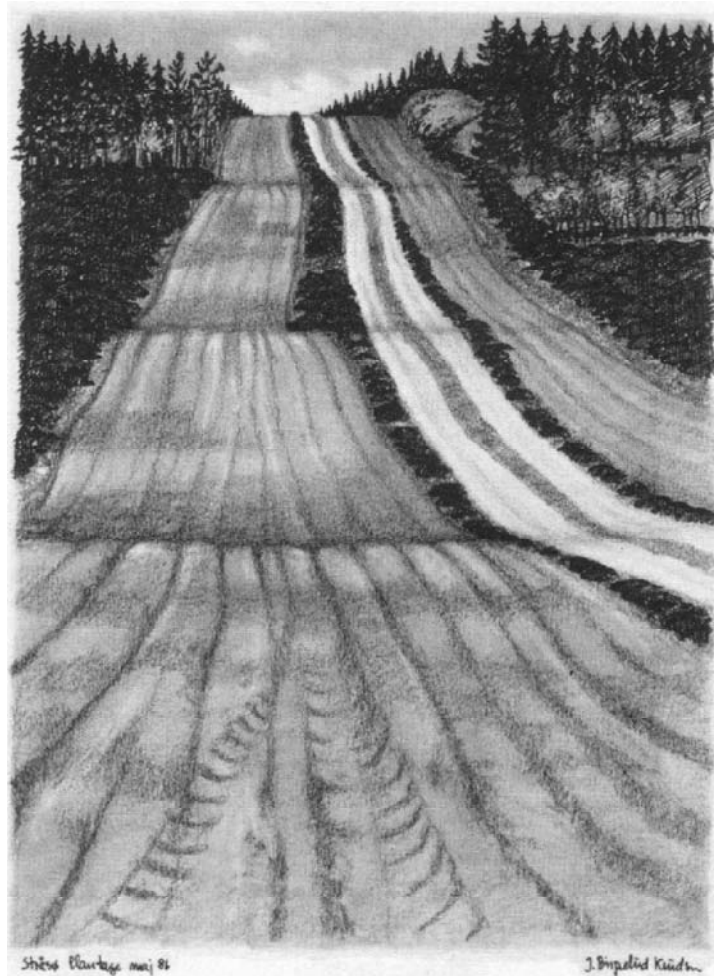
there shouldn't
have been a
sawmill here
but there was one gleaming with
brass like a chapel in mid
october – nor
should there have been a sign:
private road – no
unauthorised traffic but there
was even though death
could naturally
not be stopped by
such prohibitions

i decided to
take this road
where the elder
berries hung like exposed ovaries
black and ripe – i no longer
speculated on
whether the words had any
authority – or
whether they only pointed at them
selves – i used the words as
a last defence
a last safe
guard against death

piece number one
hundred was an acorn
that floated in one of
the path's puddles – it looked like
a small vinaigrette or like a
float – i put it
in the pocket of my windcheater
where it rattled
against the small coins – who was
to know whether precisely this
acorn would
become a wood
one fine day?

the woods stood
ablaze now
haiku upon haiku
burned to bronze without ever
finding a way to the poems
the grass flared
in the most profane colours and a
single bird
that no one saw was suddenly
nickle-plated by rain – the words
could not keep
up in this
vast leaf fall

when i had gone
two hundred metres
into shostakovich's
fifteenth quartet there was a
watercolour on my right that did not
seem to belong to
the picture – the clouds were too
cobalt violet and
the grass too green – but with
a little ingenuity i could perhaps
get the horizon
to fall into place
here in october



i was playing
black you would
have thought
that it was the other way round
at any rate i withdrew the black
knight to a
square half-covered with shadows
full of pine
needles and dried up animal droppings
a square that smelt sharply of
carbolic – i
set a trap so to
speak for death

for all the world
it looked like a
certain bridge near
rådvad – but it could not
be so since it was so many
years later
and i was passing through quite other
woods over quite
other bridges that spanned far
darker waters smoother paths and
sharper swords
but it really was
the spitting image

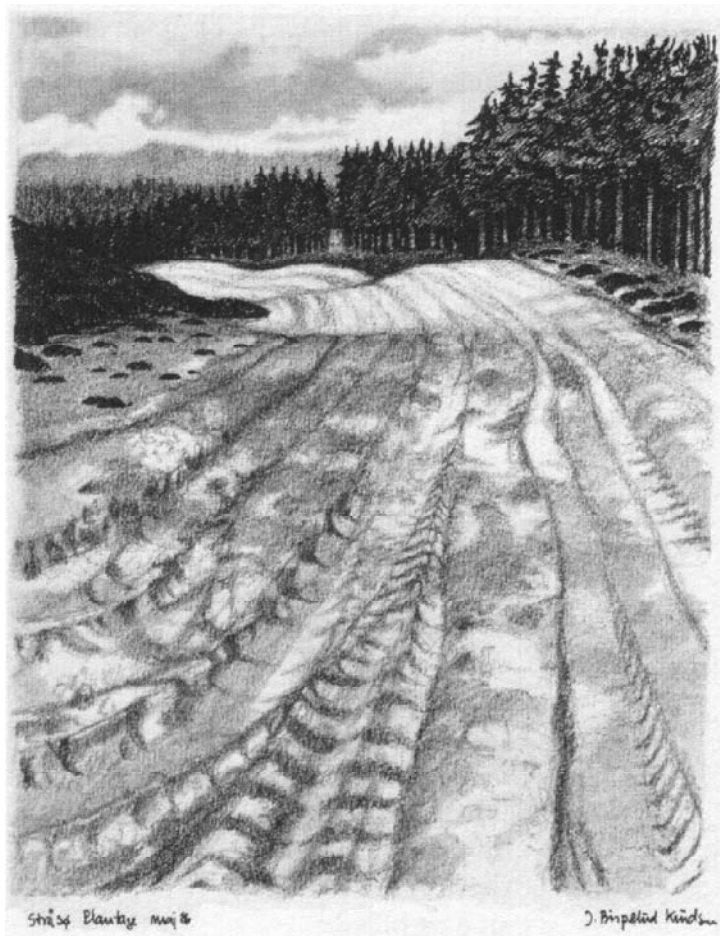
the stacks of firewood
lining the track made
me think of
millet's painting "death and the
woodcutter" – or was it the opposite
"death and the wood
cutter" made me think of
the stacks of firewood?
it was a question of what was
most present at the actual moment:
the woods in the
outer or in
the inner universe

for a while i
was confined
within schubert's
posthumous sonatas as if i had
returned to my youth when my
mother was still
happy when life had not yet
begun to scare her
and death was not hunting
her in autumn woods as
dark as the
shadows under the
acacia in her garden

behind autumn's colours
i turned round
into the reverse side
of language black with mud and bitumen
as the reverse coating of mirrors
into these surfaces
i scratched what were my most
secret poems
look now in the mirror from your side
can you see what i wrote there
or do you
irreparably
only see yourself?

in here i saw
the graphic
beauty which also
belonged to the poems when they had
first been washed with household ammonia:
the eternal play
of light and dark in the pine
corridors
the soul's own hatching down over
language – i saw rold skov wood as
it looks in
its own very
inmost image

i could hear
twenty-five years
back in the b-flat major
sonata i could hear my own
youth compressed into minutes
when i listened
to this stream of notes along whose
banks the ferns
stood with a tinge like lace
dipped in tea – hennaed like
my mother’s hair
precisely twenty-
five years ago



“death where is
thy sting” i cried
into the silence
between the second and third movements
of the c-minor sonata’s beech woods – it
was not the echo
that interested me but i was
hoping that the
words would come back to me
greener than before with a different
meaning than
the one i
deep down feared

beloved: i have
left you beyond
the rusty woodland edge
of the a-major sonata because
only i can say farewell
to my mother
here in my innermost woods
where there stands
a tree from whose roots both of us
derive – roots that reach
further down into
the earth than
even love itself

perhaps you will
wait for me then
in some other a-major
sonata on the other side of life inside
the transcendental fog-fall of the
november wood – perhaps
precisely your love will be my
thread my clue here in
death's labyrinth where the beech trunks
lie cut into suitable sizes
with pinkish pith
like vertebral columns
eaten away by cancer

deep deep within
the wood i wrote
this little poem
never did i write so mournful a
poem – the poem i wrote far out
in the wood but in the
little poem lay a little wood
never did i see
so mournful a wood – wood in the poem
poem in the wood – the wood lies deep
within the poem
the poem i wrote
far out in the wood

in the little wood
in the little poem
in the little wood
my mother lay asleep and never
had i seen death so clearly before
standing so irre
vocably austere as in her
features here in
the little wood in the little poem
in the little wood where i now walked
round in the fungi's
fairy ring unable
to find other words

and i realised the
fact that the
greatest fairytale
was that there is no fairytale
at all – that life was the one
and only fairytale
(and so there was no reason whatever
to refer to it
as a fairytale) – that all other
fairytales were only told
to show us
the way to this
single fairytale



what though should
i also have said
to death?
“don’t fell this of all trees in
the wood” – “why” – it would then
reply – “why shouldn’t
i fell a tree that no longer lives?”
and i would
not be able to find a valid
answer but only seek to pro
crastinate like
the knight in
“the seventh seal”

i found a
piece in the madder lake floor
of the wood that had to
belong to another game – at any rate
it did not fit into this one with
its far too bright
blue sky not fit into this october
twilight – was
it a piece of my mother's memory
one of the holes there were becoming
more and more of
in her conscious
ness right now?

i entered
psalm one
hundred – it was
great words that held sway here
gleaming with cinnabar like the leaves
of the pear tree after
the first night frost – i entered
among these
gilt letters from my childhood –
i entered among these
living words
that even so
were greater than death

this time death
did not catch me
unawares since
i looked it in the eye in my
mother's eyes which looked exactly
the same as mine
green and golden like the great
woods of autumn
where i found myself and black in
the depths of the shadows where life
and death melted
together to form one
unfathomableness



on the contrary
i had stolen a march
on death since
my mother was still alive and i too
when it came to it – here where
the sun hung like
a fourteen carat gold watch above
the pine wood – when
i now set it going once more twenty
six years after my maternal grandfather
had died – because
the time was ripe
precisely now

the matter would be
decided at the centre
where two moon
beams intersected (that they could
only do in the world of metaphysics)
nevertheless
i took out the black knight once more
in precisely this
light in order to dazzle my
opponent with the most obvious
in reserve
i hid the
emeralds of victory

but death uses
no tactics none at least
that i could compre
hend and but a single strategy:
to let time pass – to let the one leaf make
its slow descent yet
yellower than the one that pre
ceded it –
to let the one note follow the other
more beautifully still than in the
string quartet “der
tod und
das mädchen”

the image was be
coming cloudy as
if too much water
colour had been applied and
it was now running into puddles
on the
woodland paths – i would have to hurry
if i was to
succeed in fixing the outlines of
a distinct and meaningful farewell
in this motley
kaleidoscope
which we call death



“der tod und das mädchen”

i had never really believed that
death played the violin –
but now i was able to hear
from my mothers dying
lips that every night
she used to listen
to the strangest course of notes in
side herself that every
night she listened to
the oddest of
fairytales from within her heart which
was beating beneath the withered leaves

there was once a
 little girl who
wanted to find herself
“are you there?” – she called out
 inside the wood where
 the elder was just
blossoming as never before
“are you there?” – she called out
 into her own
 heart “are you there?”
“are you here?” the echo re
peated pulling her leg

then the girl got the idea
 that perhaps it was
her shadow that was really
herself – after all it
 followed her wherever
 she went or stood still
for a long time the girl considered
her shadow – but night
 came without stars
 and her shadow dis
appeared – and of course she could
not only be herself in the daytime

but the little girl did not
give up – she
came to a lake in the wood
and looked at her reflection
oh there she was
there she was
really herself – but the sun
extinguished the image
and the wind
erased it
so only the pale lacework
of the appearance was left

finally the girl
looked into her
beloved's eyes – there she surely
had to be among the
blue larkspurs
but her beloved
closed his eyes for just
a brief moment and
she immediately
vanished among
other dreams that she did not
know and could not see

then the little girl gave up
 trying to find herself
she no longer thought
day and night about who
 she was and where
 she should be looking
she lived out her life and
see at the stroke of midnight as
 at the wave of a
 wand she was herself
there on her deathbed among
the huge chestnut leaves

i had never really believed that
 death played the violin –
but now i was able to hear
from my mothers dying
 lips that every night
 she used to listen
to the strangest course of notes in
side herself that every
 night she listened to
 the oddest of
fairytales from within her heart which
was beating beneath the withered leaves



it was all over
i had said
goodbye to my mother
not literally or specifically
but on the far deeper paths of the
poem where she
would understand even though
she would never
read the selfsame poems – she
would understand that i would
never ever have
wished for myself
another mother

on the one hand
death is a
form of being
something one lives with at one's
side like a shadow over the grass
on the other
hand it is a stroke of the clock others
register one
fine day and when all is said
and done it is yet again
probably only
something between the
individual and god

this fact i
contented myself
with when once more
i stepped out into the daylight where
november already stood grey
with galvanised
zinc on the horizon – i
contented myself
with having had enough courage
to look death in the eye in my
mother's eyes with
the rest being something
between her and god

i had never
been so close to
death before – i
had seen it flaring in my mother's
cheeks had felt its icy cold in the
flesh i myself had
come from – and i realised
that since i
never had any siblings or
children i was inevitably the
next in biological
line that next time
it was my turn

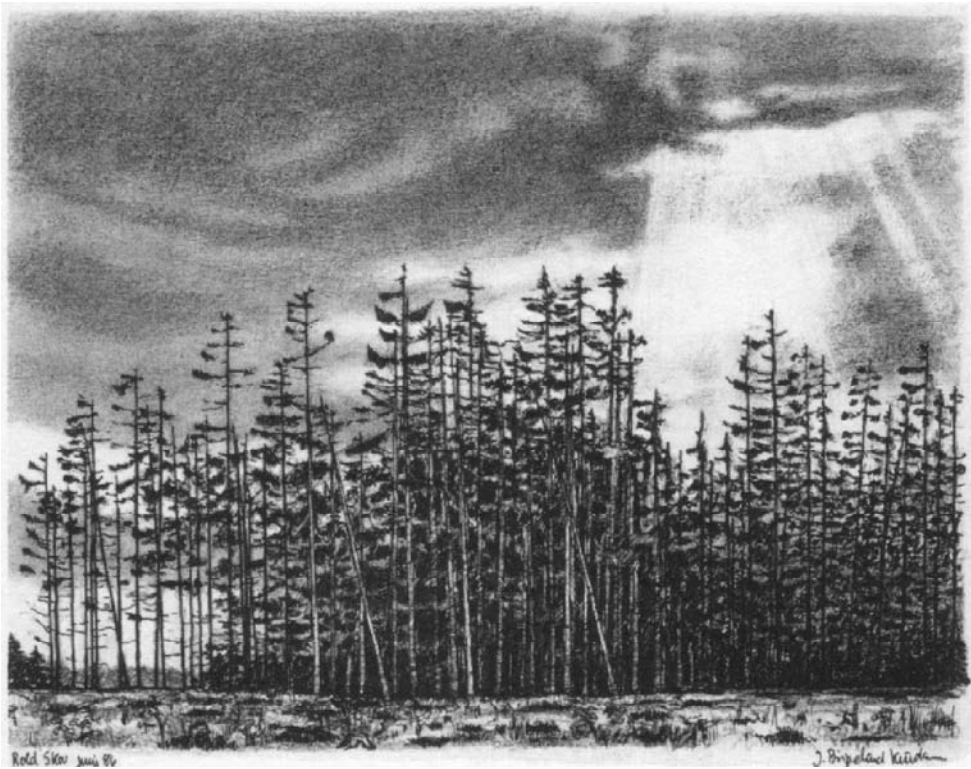
so now there would
be no more woods
to flee into
no more trunks of beeches to hide
behind – there would be no
more pieces
to search for no more rugosa
scrub to get
lost in to drown out the sharp
smell of creosote – next time there
would be no
more fairy
tales to tell

if i had met
death on the
woodland track
that turned into the second movement
of schubert's e-flat piano trio i
would have said
"dear death – have you forgotten my
mother? – she is
waiting for you in a thicket of roses
with hips redder than morphine – won't
you please show
a little mercy
and fetch her?"

and i would
have continued: "dear
death – i am prepared
to lose our game of chess together
on purpose – advance the black
pawn in a
wild attack on the left flank
stop the gold
watch without hesitation if
only you will fetch my mother
before she turns
yellow and violet
from the cortisone"

“dear death – i
will never
again ask
you stupid questions and never
again play seven-card patience
never again study
the eighth house never again
ask for a post
ponement and never again read
rilke’s requiem if only you will
free my mother from
the star-coloured
angel of cancer”

but when i
reached the allegro
and was about to
cross over to the b-flat piano trio
via a small piece of woodland
with poplar
trees beneath a naples-yellow
sky painted
by corot – my mother was still
weakly clinging to life with the
aid of drips and
suppositories
up her rectum



but i had not
after all made
any deals with death
signed with life's blood was not
as in the fairytale death's godson
able to heal
all pains and illnesses at
the head of the
bed – i had not signed any
other treaties and coronation
charters apart
from my
own poems

why was i
no longer thirty
two years old – then
it would be my mother who was
fifty – and not me in a month's time
then she would
live for another twenty-seven years
beneath the sycamore trees
on fear's terrace – the further twenty-
seven years i swore on the occasion
of another death
i would live on as a
protest against death

the road back
would be long
the road back
through fables and legends from
fairytale i had never heard
to poems i
as yet had not written the road
back through
the withered leaves from paintings of
the woods near skodsborg to dead
persons' estates of
dubious value – the road
back to what?

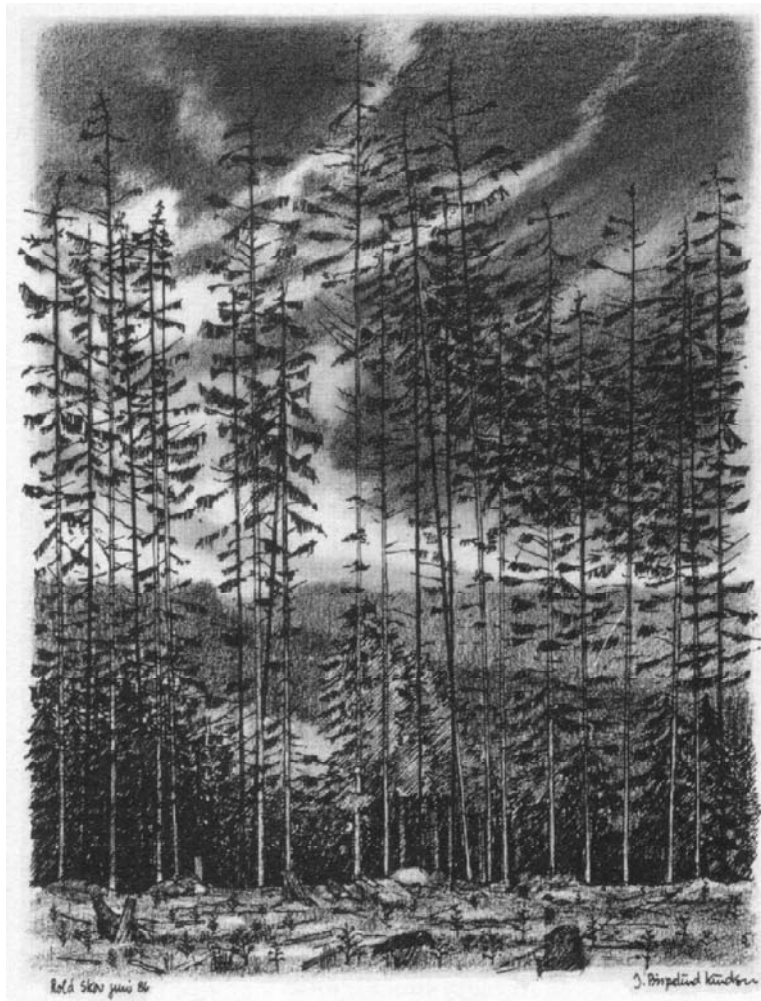
language tightened
its grip now around
the poems like
the deer fence wire netting round the
young plantations deep among the conifers
certain words had to
be spoken on the overall economy's
terms – there was
no room for other words because
they had been worn out long before
in the russet dry
spruce plantations
of the mind

i had to find
other ways than
the usual woodland
paths' syntax – the parameters
pointed in other directions
into winter's
aubergine-coloured metaphors – the
consumption of
personal pronouns had been
too large i had to reduce
the frequency of the first
person singular in
death's calculus

at precisely that
moment the moon
rose out of
its urn elevated among the clouds
like a soothsayer's crystal
ball poised
between life and death – and
i realised that
since all time is present
every moment had to contain
or simply
be its
own truth

this was the
moment of truth
the exposure
the open now where the
gold watch showed true time –
how long it lasted
is hard to say because it was
not borne
by the seconds – but the opposite
it was the moment that bore time
and the seconds
that were
the fullness of time

past and future
were only make-
do solutions which
i assumed so as not to be
constantly confronted with the
incomprehensible
fact that time was borne by
eternity
past and future were only fic-
tions i made use of to escape
the fact that
time cannot
explain itself



i am not
thereby saying that
time had come to
a halt in a dazzling white rose
i am not saying that the gold watch
did not have
any hands – i am not saying that
time equals
eternity – i am merely saying that
the course of time can only be explained
by eternity in
the double moment
of the exposure

all other con
cepts of truth were
lies because they
cheated with time (sounded
as if past and present could be
placed within time)
but all time is present in one
truth which
for precisely the same reason could
not explain itself but could
only be explained
via the intervention
of the eternal

and this moment
was truth's
in whose light
existence was lit up by its trans
figuration (eternity) where life and
understanding
coincided – where the inner
and the outer
image did not just shade
or reflect each other
but where
they corresponded
with each other

in the moment
light was shed
in over
life (between the birch trees and me)
in such a way that i no longer needed
to understand the woods
because they showed themselves as
they were and always
had been behind the mind's trans
parent veil – only a single blink
of the eye (out
of millions) and
i saw it

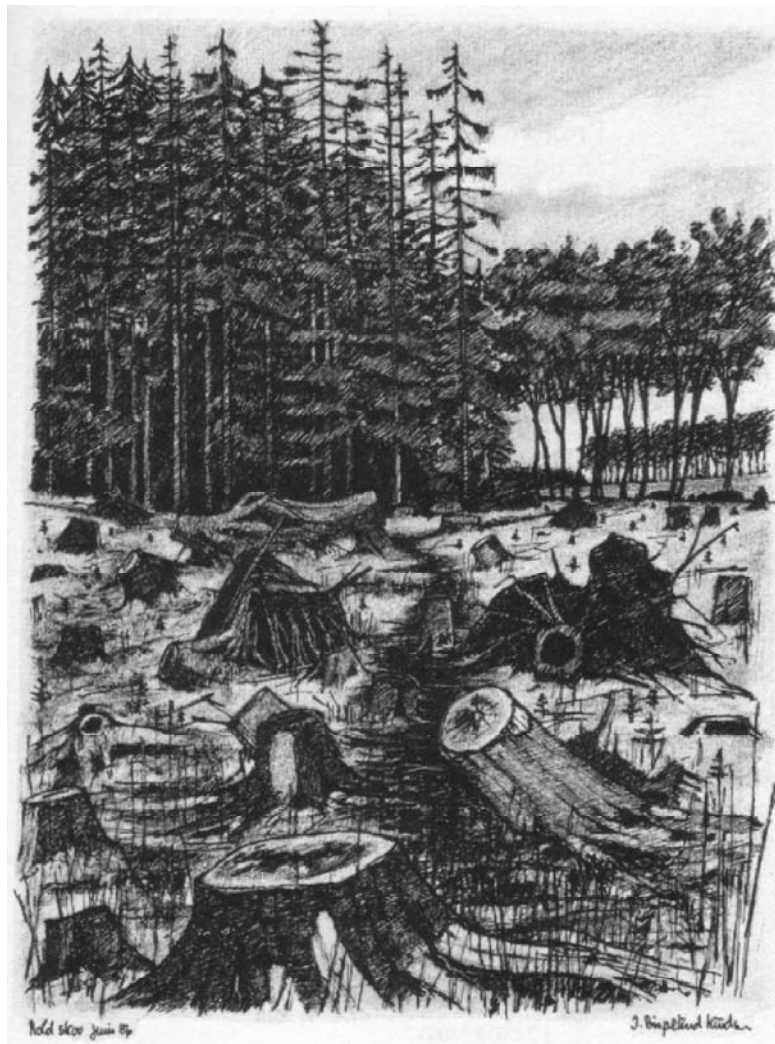
i saw that
life was no
thing else than
its own truth (that there was
no fairytale inside the fairytale)
i saw
the whole (even though i did
not understand it)
because the moment of exposure
(or the open now) lit up
life showed
the fairytale
as it was

i opened
the case of the
golden watch and
read the true time – it was
late – i would soon be completely
alone in the world
genealogically speaking – the family
tree would soon
only stretch my own branches up
towards the naked sky where winter's
violet clouds
once more
obscured the moon

i followed a
large stone wall
lining a wood of
sycamores that were still green on
all souls' day – once more
i entered the rift
to collect more pieces for
another wholeness
which perhaps would ultimately
prove to be the same as
the one i
had just seen in
november's first light

perhaps i searched
so deeply into
schubert's sonatas
(there where the woods were
at their darkest and the ferns waved
like angels' wings)
because a wholeness does not
become a unity
until it is once more made up
of bits and pieces in the
jigsaw puzzle that
could be called
"the woods"

and precisely in
the b-major sonata
i found piece
number one hundred and fifty-six
(just behind the gamekeeper's cottage
to the left of
the heart) – it was a piece of
squared paper
from a notebook on which was written:
“and precisely in the b-major sonata
i found piece
number one hundred
and fifty-six...”



in the midst of
reading the fairytale
about death's messenger
i paused and closed the book
perhaps because i did not want to know
how it ended
or perhaps precisely because i
could recall
how it ended or perhaps
because all fairytales when it
comes down to
it lead to
the same thing

why should i
take all these
detours through
the woods near mørkøv
why couldn't i simply write
that my mother
was dying? – because death
is not so
simple? – because my feelings
were more complex than the
ivory-black
telegramme of the
obituary?

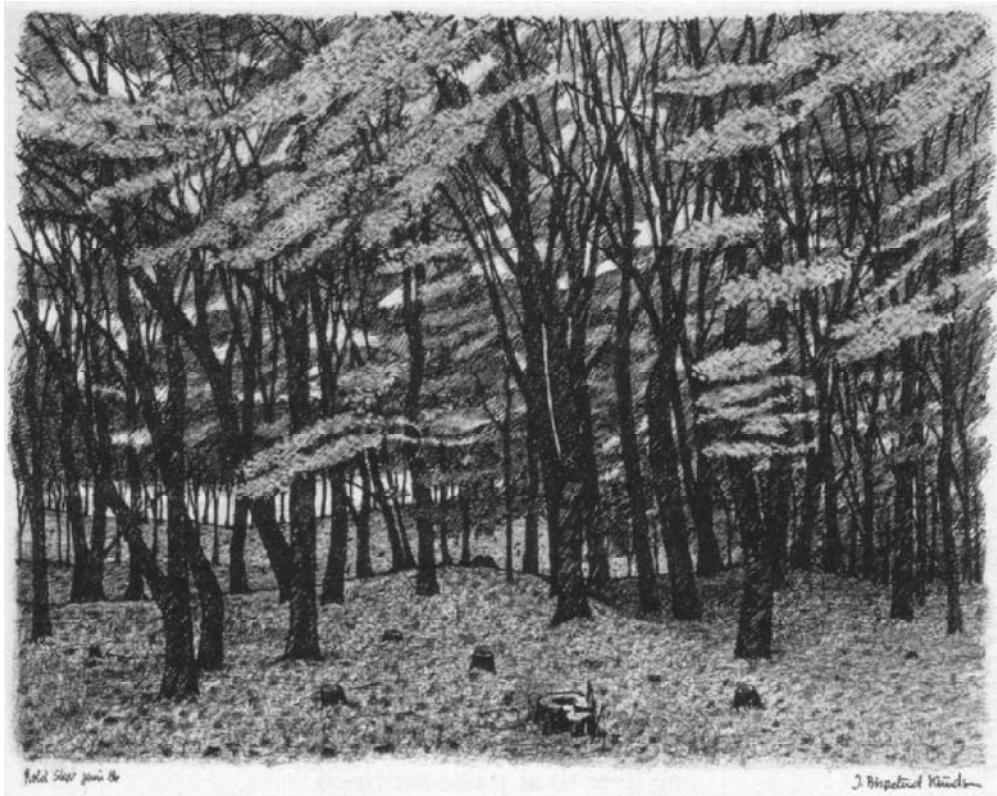
during my child
hood my mother
told me all sorts
of fairytales before i was to
sleep – the one about the seven ravens
and the one about
the star talers – she told me about
the princess
and half the kingdom – now it
was me telling her
the last fairytale before
she was to sleep

it was true
i could clearly
hear the swans
like the distant ringing of a
bell out behind november's
malachite out from
the sea on the north coast like a
call to the soul's
final transformation – had my
mother's soul all the time actually
been an enchanted
swan that was
now escaping?

the picture had
begun to resemble
now – the right
mixture of chromium oxide and
prussian blue behind the trees – the
broad brushstrokes
with caput mortuum in the foreground
the picture had
begun to resemble reality but
i didn't let myself be fooled so easily –
i well knew that
realism was
the greatest illusion

i well knew
that so-called
simplicity was only
a make-do solution – to con oneself
that one could write the thistles out
or death for
that matter was not to
abandon philosophy
in favour of life – it was simply
bad philosophy – life and death
were intertwined
in a far more
complex mandala

the sun was
far too red and
the night was far
too black for it to be november –
the sky was more reminiscent
of an august
sky but it really was
the november
sunset that was flaring up
feverishly like the artificial
flush of
prednison in
my mother's face



and there you then stood my love
in the soul's midst
in the magic circle
of the fairytale exactly as i
had hoped and
since the only
fairytale is precisely life i
only needed to
snap my fingers
and you also stood in the midst
of my reality's only begotten light

perhaps though one ought to be
a sunday's child
or at least
be able to solve the riddle
as in the
nursery rhyme:
do you do you do you want to go
to the woods with me
if it should prove
possible to get the fairytale
and life to fit together

for example my mother could
suddenly not
remember her “our father”
she had forgotten the fairytale’s most
important formula
that was to open
the final door in the woodkeeper’s cottage
in the depths
of the woods
where the ash traces led in and
the moon gleamed green with silver heirlooms

after walking for three days in shos
takovich’s tenth
quartet we came
to an even larger wood where
the bird cherry stood
my mother’s tree
and even though the one leaf that
still hung there
was greener
than life itself we knew deep
down what it signified

death had apparently
lost interest
in our game
perhaps because white's position was
bad and death
therefore preferred
to win on time even though it
was its wing
that would
fall first on the chess clock while
mine was temporarily stopped

we were now also in possession of
the missing
pieces in this
strange jigsaw puzzle that
we had called:
the woods – it
was only a question of placing
them correctly
in relation to
each other and in that whole we had
already laid out as a glass mosaic

the darkest pieces of madder lake
had for example to
be placed at the bottom
on the woodland floor which at this
time of year looked
as if it had been
dipped in stain – others that
looked a bit like pieces of
linoleum cuts were to
be fitted into that those hazels that
were clearly at the centre of the picture

when we turned the next page in death's
book it had
already become
winter and the illustrations had
changed into
black and white
etchings: naked rose bushes
in the heart's en
closure – the writing
was unclear but with difficulty
we spelt our way through to this poem



on the opposite page the rays of
the sun broke through
the branches whose
shadows cast almost
gothic writing
over the paper
(as if my mother was on the point
of escaping death)
but death was not
able to fool me – i knew
better – my love knew better

in the woods of all minds the year's
first snow fell as
holy as death and just
as silent – in the woods of all
souls and hearts in
christianity's woods
deep inside poetry the first snow
fell over my
own tree's violet
crown and over yours my love
wherever they were in the fairytale

in all of denmark's woods the first snow
descended like
magic powder
gently as the snow in christmas's her
metic glass globes
to which death
had no entry and grief
did not yet
exist with its
burial smoke – in all the woods
of childhood the snow was falling

we were not following any special
track (unless perhaps
the various endings
of the verbs) because none had
yet been left
in the smouldering
salts of the melting snow
we went from word
to word as they
seemed most beautiful from 'silver
fir' to 'groundsel' for example

it was difficult to explain what
we were doing
here among the
fairytales' magenta among
traumas full
of smoke among
stacks of birchwood – it was
all the more
difficult since
we had long since realised there
was no solution to the riddle

maybe it was to keep
 death in check
 or in the most
literal sense to keep it
 at bay: as long as
 i went on writing
death would not strike – but
 how did this
 hang together with
calculus' definitive number of poems
what when the words had been used up?

we moved on along shostakovich's
 thirteenth quartet
 from whose spruce woods
the shadow-coolness was cast
 over the poem's
 paths and suddenly
i felt the burden of having to be
 the last one
 of a lineage as if
life had lost its way in the
blind labyrinths of my veins



once more we opened a page in
winter's thick folio
and considered the
candelabras of spruce trees that
had been lit by
hoar frost as
altar candles at the high church
festivals after
trinity when
the darkness is deepest within the
great woods and the human mind

we read in the fallen leaves
 (which now had
 assumed the colour
of iron oxide) – attempted to
 find a connection
 in this great
mortuarium whose writing was slowly
 being erased by the
 snow before we had
managed to take in let alone
understand summer's secret message

would our own writing also dis
 appear at some point
 as horace believed
when he wrote: "mortalia
 facta peribunt"
 or was it precisely
the difference between life and art
 that the word would
 survive just as
horace's own utterance undeniably and
paradoxically might seem to signify?

i moved aggressively now so as to
get it all over
it looked like a
sacrifice and perhaps it was too
this combi
nation between
pawn knight and rook beautiful
and menacing
like the fess
of rubies in death's coat of arms
i was now playing with raised visor

the battle for the centre had been won
i had cleared
the four heraldic
quarters of roses and rose hips
death had under
estimated me here
on my home ground in the depths
of fairytale's
woods – it would
probably have been a different game
out on the chessboard of reality

the endgame could begin – it
looked difficult
intricate and
entangled like the brambles
in shostakovich's
fifth quartet
full of an peculiar pale
light like that in
my mother's eyes
when she gazed at the november
clouds above st luke's almshouse

there was a time when she wished
for the sun but
the sun was too
hot so my mother wished for
the moon instead
but the moon was
too cold and the stars too
clear and now
she was standing at
the world's end there were no more
wishes left – now that it really mattered

there were still uncharted spots on
our map of the woods
we advanced to
the edge of one that had the shape
of gurre lake
could new words
help us or other images?
but here all that
reigned were 'rushes'
and 'reeds' and 'moon's death mask'
reflected in the siccatives

the snowstorms now came on in
earnest covering
that wholeness we
had almost gathered with white
sheets as in
abandoned homes
or in hospital wards where
death has
just paid a
visit – the snowstorms filled our
consciousness with large gaps of memory

the poem froze to the woodland floor
like a white
palimpsest on
whose surfaces we could only read
eternity
and a few
traces of birds but not the writing
which we knew
the snow was
covering – no matter how persistently
we tried to wipe away the words

it was like breaking a sealed
envelope and
beginning to
read the forbidden words of
a will that
had not yet
come into force because death
had not taken place
it would have
been like snuffing out an altar
candle during divine service



piece number one hundred and ninety
fell into place
in the south
eastern corner of jægersborg
enclosure near a
red gate i had
once opened in order to forget
myself
now i
slammed the gate shut precisely
in order not to forget myself

and right enough – there stood
my pawns in an
oblique row black as
gutted stars in orion's belt
exactly as
i had written
in the first poem of this poem
in the midst of
the woods as
a sign that i had conquered
death on the chessboard of legends

but out in the spruce woods of
reality “the robin
gathered
needles and twigs into a wreath”
as it said
in another
fairytale written a long time before
the sun went
down in its
bonfire of roses and silicon out there
to the west where the world ends

perhaps i had only diverted
death's attention
for a brief
moment from my mother's sick-bed
(like the man
who lured
death up into an apple tree
where it had to sit
for seven years while
no one died) perhaps she would have
been best served by my having lost?

but who was i to believe
i could keep
death at bay by
playing and talking? – “just you
keep on writing
your poems and
beating me at chess and i'll fetch
your mother while
your attention
is diverted” – i could almost hear death
whisper in my ear's hawthorn thicket

death was clearly carrying a two-edged
sword (with a
hilt of corundums?)
i understood when the doctor said:
“the medicine has
side-effects
on the one hand it perks up
the patient on
the other
hand it breaks down the body’s
powers of resistance at the same rate”

once more reality began to
seep in between
the poems like
the mist through november’s trellis
the words referred
again to stones
we could stumble over on wood
land paths – more
than to the
precious stones that light up the fairy
tales from within with st elmo’s fire

in my mother's house which lay behind
a hawthorn thicket in
shostakovich's
second quartet sleep however con
tinued to reign
the china
toads and hedgehogs on
the window sills
were still waiting
for the final transformation – was the
prince on his way on his black horse?



to be in these rooms was like
leafing through a
book on roses
from malmaison – roses that no
longer grew
in nature
extinct species that could only be
found on wall charts
it was like saying
'rosier valmorin' knowing full well that
the name did not correspond to anything

my mother had also given
me a nickel
key to a
long-gone white-painted chest
of drawers
where papers
were said to be that had
never existed
but this riddle
i was also unable to solve
in her version of the fairytale

the trees were now more bare
 than in shosta
 kovich's sixth
quartet glistening with iodine
 and time had
 no longer
come but gone out there in the branches
 in order to
 count the last
fall of raindrops – the words beat
slowly now like my mother's pulse

we had not followed fairytale rules
 all that closely but
 had sometimes
cheated with the parameters
 swapped roses and
 hawthorns when it
fitted the poem best and used
 too many verbs
 where it was
forbidden – was that why we
were banished to reality again?

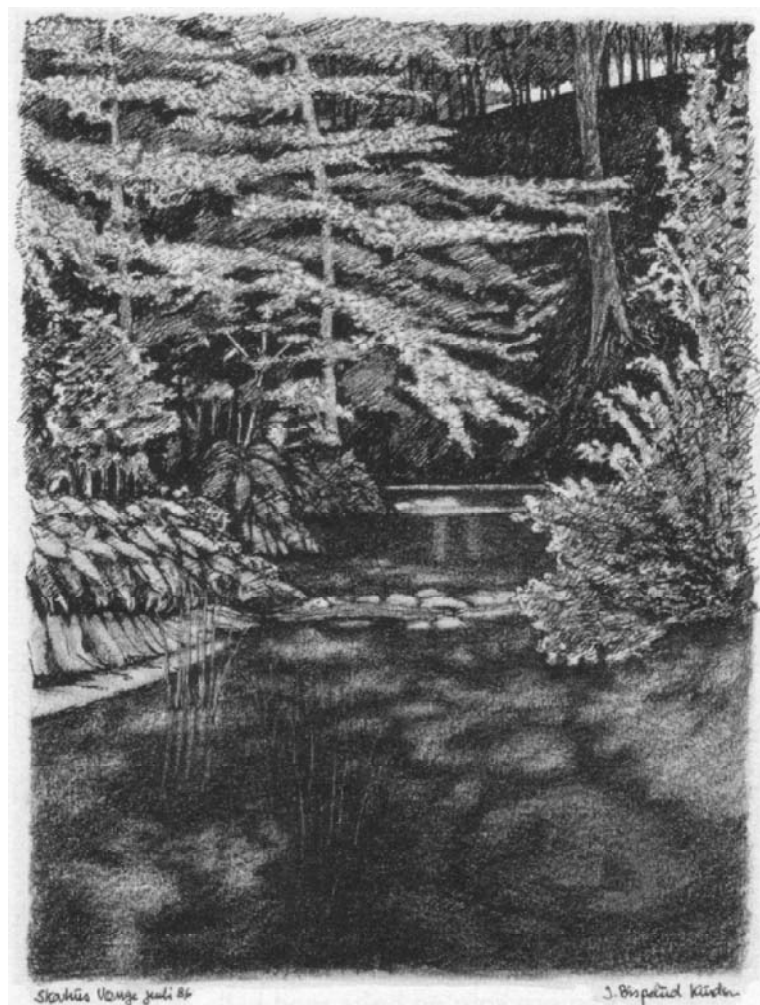
it was cold outside the myths
in the birch wood
where the charcoal stacks
had long since burned down in
poetry of another
age that filled
our poems with smoke and a darkness
for which we
could find no
explanation precisely because the words
would make it incomprehensible

but here too we felt ourselves
as unwelcome guests
here in the
second half of the kingdom
the trees told
their own
winter fairytales which had
nothing to do
with either
tailors hunters or death disguised
in a white coat like doctor Know-all

the sun rose out of the eleventh
quartet shedding
the light of its
trinity over nordskoven's madder lake
replacing the past
with faith
the future with hope and the present
with love
so that what
was predicted in the fairy
tales should come to pass

was it really munch's painting
of a winter wood
i was repro
ducing with the red lead of words?
it began to
look like it now
that four fifths of the pieces
had been put together
or was i
simply so close that the whole could
no longer be viewed unambiguously?

we were faced with an
unusual problem:
piecemeal we were
unable to recognise anything but
the bits of the mirror
and now that the
mountain of glass was being put
together to form a whole
it was so smooth
that only the magic saddle
could take us to its summit



the cloudy weather smouldered more
above the coniferous
woods than in
the wolf valleys of the mind or above
the poems' secluded
plains from where
a strange melody still came played
on cors anglais
the cloudy weather
smouldered deep within december
through the carvings of the branches

forty kilos from death we realised
that there was
nothing brilliantly
coloured about it no
mother-of-pearl
sky – we realised that death was
not in the woods
but between sheets
sweaty with snow – that death is
bare as a basin of lime

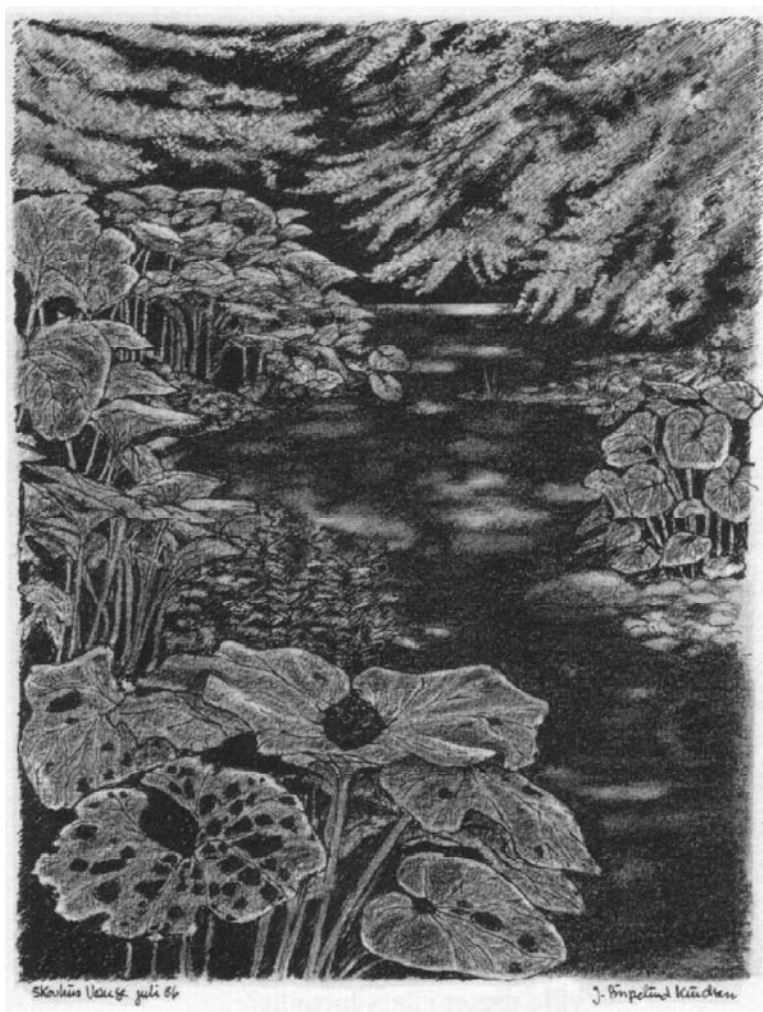
even so we discovered the treasure
buried at this
destination
in the midst of the third quartet
not in the form of
emeralds and
gold coins but as old
swiss francs
that had to be
rapidly exchanged if the edel
weiss on the notes wasn't to fade

my mother had not amassed this
fortune for
her own sake
(to make use of it) not for
my sake either
but for abstract
reasons as a steelyard
so she could
find the right
balance between soul and matter
(for which i make use of words)

we first fully understood the
expression 'the north
ern darkness' in the
woods around jyderup where the
night lay so dense
and ebony-black
in the brushwood that we had to
place piece number
two hundred and
eleven blindly on the surface of a
painting we could not recognise either

to put it another way in another
key as clear
and sky-blue
as the ninth quartet in e-flat major
meant this:
could you
not decide to die now?
we cannot
stand this
waiting any longer from pill to pill
from one eternity to the other

but death had no mercy
not on
us either
no opportune moment – did not
come to order
clad in black cloying
ness with scythe over its shoulder
we had to find
our way out of
the woods for ourselves on life's
far side behind january's spruce fence



the facts replaced the fairytales
one by one
the swollen
knees full of water the loss of hair
like snow
the livers spots
larger than woodland lakes – my
mother's bird-skull
was the only
fantastic thing still left behind
in the tale about fitcher's bird

could i not rely on my poem
any longer
which had formerly
always disclosed the truth
when i myself
tried to lie
my way into beauty's dark collusion
among rubies
and full moons?
what other story would
the poem otherwise tell?

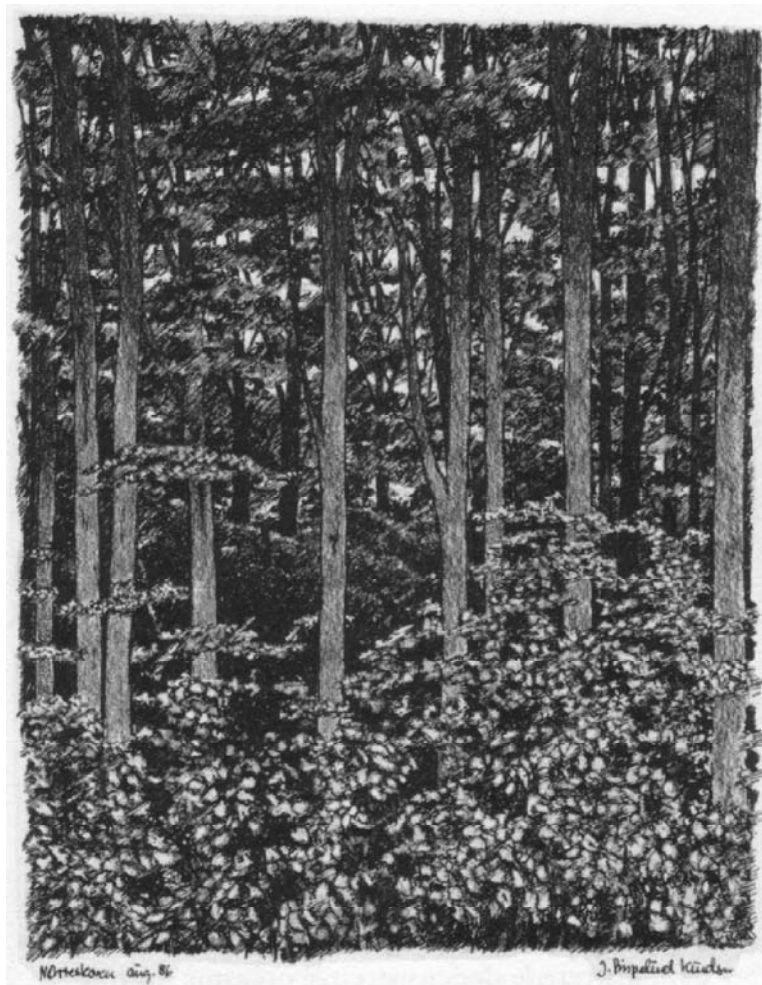
the winter solstice flashed briefly
within the darkness
like the
last gold my mother wanted
filled in a
molar on
the day of judgment (even this
touch of vanity
i forgave her
on behalf of death) the winter solstice
flashed briefly like artillery fire

we pushed our way in among alders
into a poem by
edith södergran
because we recalled that there was
a gate there
that stood open
to the east a gate that not
even death could
close because
it did not swing open and
shut on time's rusty hinges

my mother's handwriting gradually
looked like the
brambles in
skanseskoven – chased with
large leaves in
december's hoar
frost and just as illegible – what
was the actual
message we got
at the last moment so secret that
probably only god could decipher it?

we had come out of the inner woods
in the midst of which
the game stood
exactly as we had left it
and if no one
has since
shifted the pieces about they
still stand there
waiting for
the winning move beneath orion's
reflection and the falling snow

the seconds were stretched to breaking point
became longer than hours while
the fever rose in inverse proportion to
the frost and the afterglow above
asnæs woods or swung like the variables
in the poem that could not
be controlled by consciousness



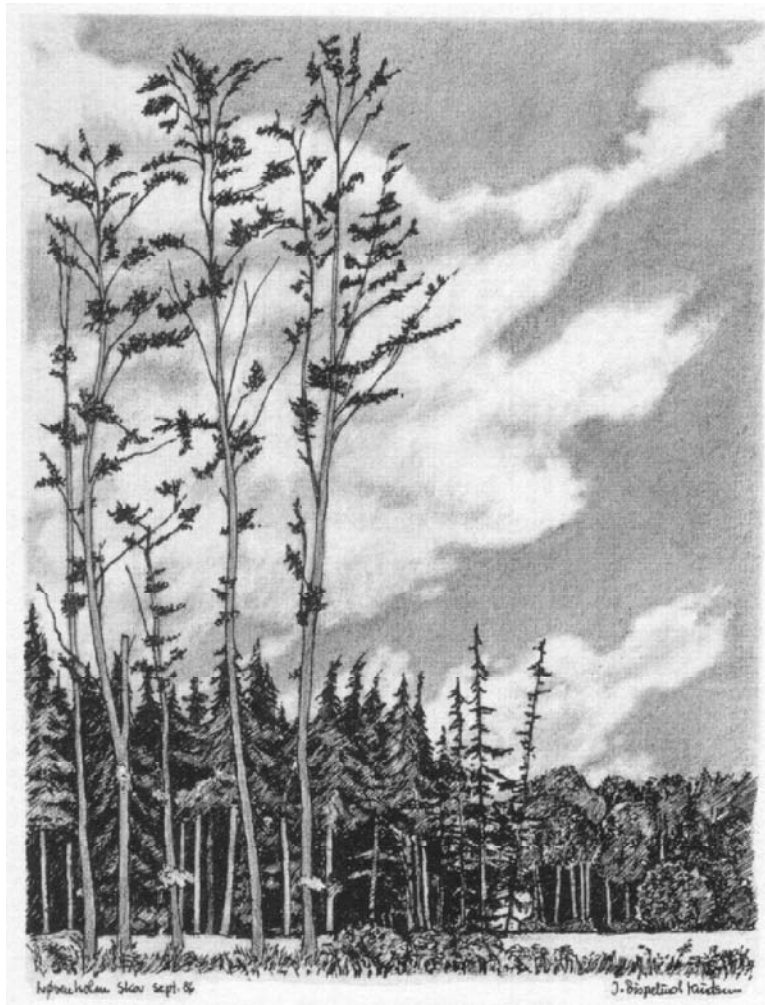
we entered the twenty-sixth psalm
because its tenth verse was written
on the wall in the room where my mother was
to die – ‘for with thee is the fountain of life’
it said in bronze gilding above the door
here where the winter dusk and the
cerebral haemorrhages darkened my mother’s mind

like all children i in a certain way had
also learned life from my mother both
for fairytales’ good and reality’s evil
(at moments of high exaltation it was
the opposite) and now she gave me the final lesson
that was to make me a master: she
demonstrated death’s strict orgasm for me

there she lay in an even stricter celibacy
looking like a nun painted by an
unknown flemish renaissance artist while
the sun shed its winter light into
room number two hundred and thirty-three
lighting it up in a last revelation
brighter than one of st bridget's visions

the prince had finally woken up my mother
from life's great sleep – he had proposed
to her with a bouquet of marguerites
and now the thirteenth of december of
this year he took her with him to heaven in
a scent of clementines as the
most natural lucia bride of the world

death had interrupted the fourth quartet
in the middle of the andante and
among the birch trunks time had stopped
for the three days when the soul
was still reflected in the body's mother of pearl
but out there on the far side of
eternity the allegretto continued unmoved



the pieces had fallen into place before the game
was over precisely because life is
not a game on an ivory-inlaid chessboard
or the game was over before the pieces
had been put in position because death
is precisely not a black knight of
ebony and boxwood weighted with lead

that is why poem number two hundred
and twenty seven perfectly suited
the collection "the woods" (where it also
occupies its rightful place) but it was
not precisely suited to life
or to death even though it almost
also completed this secret mosaic

the remaining pieces would be easy to place
in position – they would fall into place of
their own accord because of some inner necessity
over which i had no influence
they would place themselves over the black holes
in the picture covering them with a
love that allayed both the loss and the grief

and look – now the winter solstice rose
from the dark like a hidden jewel case
full of reddish-yellow pearls amethysts and my
mother's topazes as in the fairytales
look now my mother's dreams rose up in
reality's half kingdom so
as to gild it to our days' end

and the great bear opened its treasure chest
like a secret box of skovshoved bank
and the moon lifted its family silver more
gleaming-white than the flowers at a funeral
and the sleeping beauty's castle behind the thorn
hedge in ordrup woke to a short hectic life
before its effects were spread to the four auctions

and in the great woods peace descended
because all my mother's secrets had
been revealed – to me here in finiteness
and to herself there where the world
ends – in the great woods the snow fell
once more like the holy spirit and ash
from the crematorium over all the questions

and the silence closed in around its own echo
its own hermeneutical circle – shut
us out – spread and grew like rings
after a stone we had once thrown in
furesøen – grew day by day after each
death at dizzying speed towards
infinity – the silence after the dead

and the letter i received post mortem
seemed to me more and more impor
tant – the letter where my mother wrote there
had been communion in the ward and
she hadn't understood a single word of it
the letter where her own last words also
slid down into unintelligibility

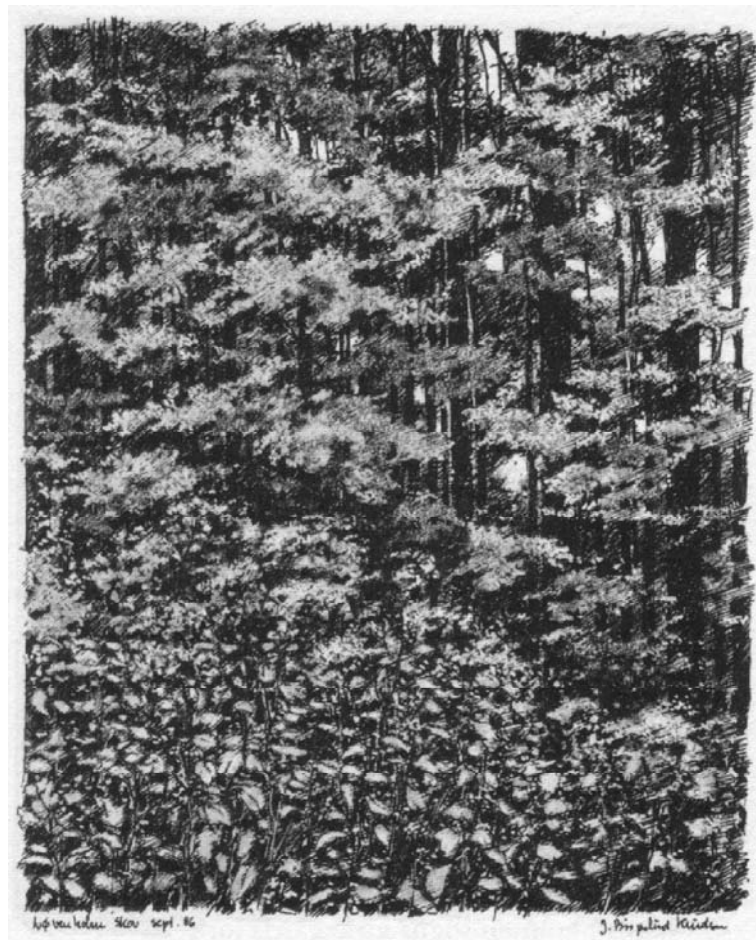


and i gave up all further analysis of those
thirty-year-old chess games that had
preoccupied me for so long because i wanted to
find out what mistakes i had made and if
they could have been won – i let the
king’s indian variants be covered with snow
on the rose-tree squares of the innermost woods

and in the family woods too (were they to be found
anywhere else at all than in
imagination's snowfall now that i was the
last branch of the family tree?)
a special light gleamed that perhaps came
from the electric light bulbs that lay on
asbestos in my childhood christmas landscapes

and the frost hardened the memory into a
diamond so hard and clear that its rays
removed all impurities and stains from
the conscience – a diamond so glitteringly
pure as winter lightning as the precious stone
my mother had worn on her ring
finger during her happiest hours

and we opened one image after the
other in the image (like a kind of isen
heim altar) but finally the image simply
repeated itself and we knew we had to
search in the poem's other direction to the south
west among shostakovich's second and first
piano concertos where the sky burned like a cremation



and it was my mother's own father who almost
seemed to blow down the sun in this
final trumpet fanfare as he had done so often
when alive (including once from an
open window on the fourth floor when he played
"heilige nacht" out across the back yard)
it was her father blowing the sun black

and that is how it came about on a late winter's day
that we stood at the outermost grave southwest
of the heart and saw a red ceramic urn be
lowered into the poem in behind
the temple – that is how it came about that the
cornerstone of the eternal was put in
place in the earth of holmen parish cemetery

and so it happened that along certain lines in
a sonnet that was never written
we one fine day once more came to the outer
most woods where we scattered the ashes
of my mother's last letters and private
papers: divorce decrees proofs of
changes of name and old death certificates

and the woods also once more assumed their
natural positions out in reality around
their respective lakes ponds and hill brows –
once more assumed their proper names
'forskoven' or 'skanseskoven' on the cadastre maps
so we could read where we were with
our poems about the selfsame woods

and because we wanted the words once more to be
taken at face value (even though they would
thereby lose in intensity) we quoted further from the
books about the great woods: “in many trees
age leads to changes to the inner wood with heartwood
being formed from dead cells” even though these words
also seemed symbolic now after my mother’s death

and we began again to follow the course of the year
more than our own inclinations
the stars and the sun that was now in capri
corn white with electrolysis and
january’s cold gusts of wind through the woods
and the heart’s chambers where pain’s
flame flickered unsteadily like wet fir trees

and now that the picture was practically complete
we could see that it was an uncanny resemblance
like a reproduction of a hans memling painting
resembles the original and like memling's
painting is an uncanny resemblance of his own vision
were the cracks really the only difference
were in reality the words really the only difference?

there would at any rate be for all eternity one piece
missing from the puzzle (or be one too many)
we could neither be in my mother's wholeness any
longer
nor understand our own – for we could not
go out into the woods with the poem collection
“the woods” and believe that the circle would thus
be completed – the description could not contain itself

“the second burial is the worst one – the burial
in yourself and in the poem”
i was to learn to my cost the truth of my own words
in a yet deeper square root of language
the third burial was the cruellest with
its smell of naphthalene and maja soap when
i scattered my mother’s underwear in diverse containers

we were approaching the perimeter of the sixth
circle where the thistles stood bleached by
winter’s chlorine on the slopes that slanted away
from the mind – one more step and we would
emerge into the second half of the kingdom
where the spell was lifted – had
the fairytale really only taken place in the poems?



and the first thing
we saw was the chestnut tree
the last tree
my mother had seen
with the small faun
among the branches
that neither the nurses
nor doctors had been
able to see but that
we too saw quite clearly
with his snow cap
the day she died

and the eldertree we saw
behind the spruce fence
with branches of white
coral and blossoms
as large as
the hoar frost of memory
i did not have a childhood
any more my mother
had taken it with her
in there where the elder
flowers all year round
whiter than common salt

and the lime tree we had
almost forgotten even though
it stands on the threshold
of every fairytale
making sure that only
those who take reality
seriously are let in
the lime tree with the
sharp silhouette of its
winter crown like an ace of spades
now we remembered it
when it let us out

and the ash tree we
naturally also sought after
the violet ash
tree of our dreams
but it did not stand
here on the edge of the woods
among grasses yellowed
by death it stood in
the midst of another
poem in a completely different
fairytale that i
will relate some time



and the poplar waved
goodbye from the fringe of the
wood's silver brocade
banished us to
the regions east of the myths
where the trees of
reality grow and thrive
the poplar waved
us out into life
once more with its
crown's bare and
torn-up heart-roots

and the pine tree smelled
so sweet in mid
january when it had
been sawn up and smelled
sweeter than my
mother's soul now it
was blowing through
the woods one last
time before it
left the poem the pine
tree smelled more strongly
than my mother's death

and the rowan tree
did not have anything
to tell because
no one can tell itself
and the larch tree
the loveliest tree in the wood
did not have anything
to relate because no one
can quote himself
and we did not have
anything more to tell
because the fairytale was over

and precisely there where
the fairytale and reality
intersected each
other we turned
out of the woods or
to put it
another way: we went out
of the poem between
the words 'fairytale'
and 'reality'
because there was no
room for us any longer

the woods stood white behind the
winter far in behind their own
words like a closed
bible full of snow showers

and we knew that the stars would
fall over my mother's grave
to our days' end and that only god would
thereafter be able to decipher its inscription

THE SKIES
(time)

the skies burned deep within
themselves like mirrors
that had to be shattered
blown to bits and pieces

by a trumpet so hard and pure
as miles davis' when he scatters
the clouds like frozen alcohol
over the shiny surfaces

it was clear to me that i had to
untie that reef knot
of grief i had
tied in language and the poems
and that now rose
up like a dark
bank of cloud out across asnæs like
a horse's head
of galvanised
zinc that threatened to
corrode from the inside

the one
sky more
merciless than
the other moved in from the west
dull like formica kitchen tables
the one
sky more indifferent than the
other with
its calculations for a future
moved unhindered through the memory
from temporal
bone to
temporal bone

there was no longer any
storm centre on
a distant horizon
holding my existence to
gether no imminent
case of death
determining my actions
no more fairies
from the fairytales
governing the system's four-in-hand
i had to live it myself from one word to the next

as a start i went out to
the house i had
inherited because i
knew that it was empty i sat
down on the floor of
the middle room and
said: you are getting old
then i looked at
the sky which was black
and white with chrome and tried to
write colours into the poem



but i could
not find the words
 they had hidden
 themselves in my poem
i could not
 find the words because
i had already found
them i could not find
 other words because i
had already written them
 down on the paper's
white february sky

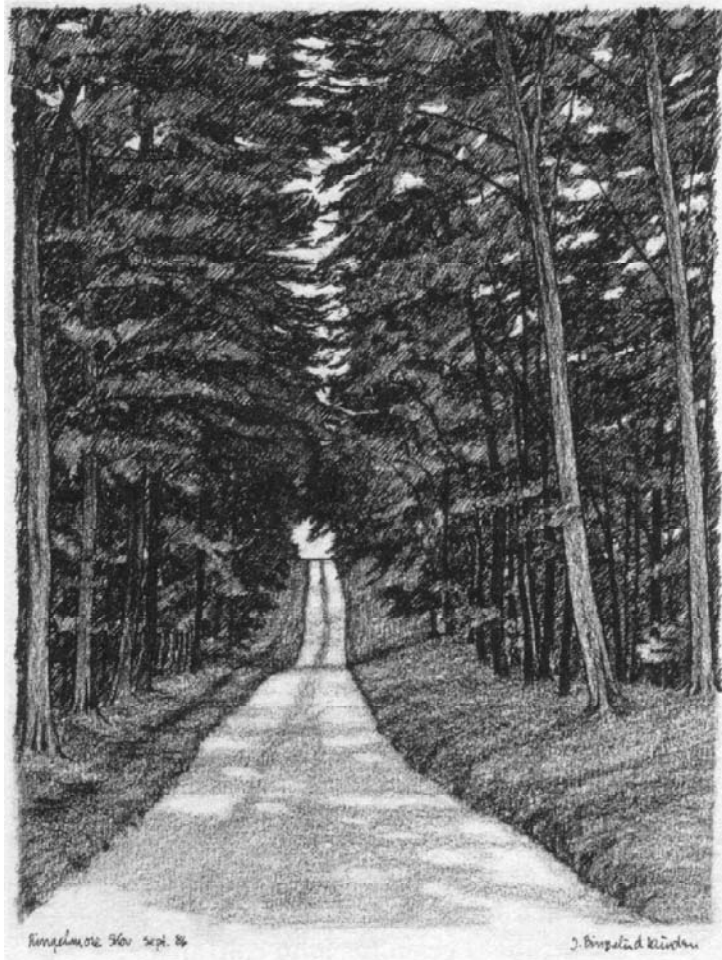
the following day the sky still lay over
røsnæs like a canvas primed with
white alkyd paint waiting for a single
ray of sunshine a scalpel as sharp as
lucio fontana's – but the sky did not tear
even though large pieces of my consciousness
drifted out over the sea as irrevocable past

what was
it i was
attempting?
to write existence into language
or language out into life?
didn't i know
that the gulf between life and
art was deeper
than the sky was high more irreparable
than a slashed artery – didn't i
know that the
poem was itself
this abyss?

6/2 11.15 the sky was dazzling
ly black with a silver star in th
e bottom left-hand corner – pro
bably sirius perhaps painted by
robert indiana in memory of his
mother the sky was quite cloudl
ess and larger than childhood's f
ear – as background music i chos
e sonny rollins

the sky was
grey all day long
like a shut-down
iron foundry sooty at the edges
my mouth had a nasty smell
it seemed to me –
what was i to do about existence
when i could only
commit it to paper in poems
at certain selected moments
what about
the rest
of time?

no living mother's soul could
sit and
wait for this
electronic flash of insight and
call it its
life – life had
to be lived all the time and it was
precisely that which
opened up the abyss
between art and life – no human
being could make his life absolute



the first improvisation on
time – was it
that problem which had pre
occupied the men of music – first
and foremost of jazz
(john coltrane for
example?) – did he refuse to
accept that his playing became art
did he want to play
life itself on his tenor?
had he discovered the hole in music
through which the notes disappeared?

did john coltrane attempt to
play that which he was
already playing? – was john
coltrane unable to play his
life because he was
living it? – was he unable
to live his life because he was
playing it? – did the one
in other words block out
the other? did john coltrane get
in his own way – did 'john coltrane'
get in the way of john coltrane?

was john coltrane unable to
get into the saxophone
was the saxophone unable to
get into john coltrane? – was
john coltrane unable
to merge with his
tenor saxophone except in the
blissful moments when he
was filled with his own
innermost note? – except
in the blissful moments when ‘john
coltrane’ was united with john coltrane?

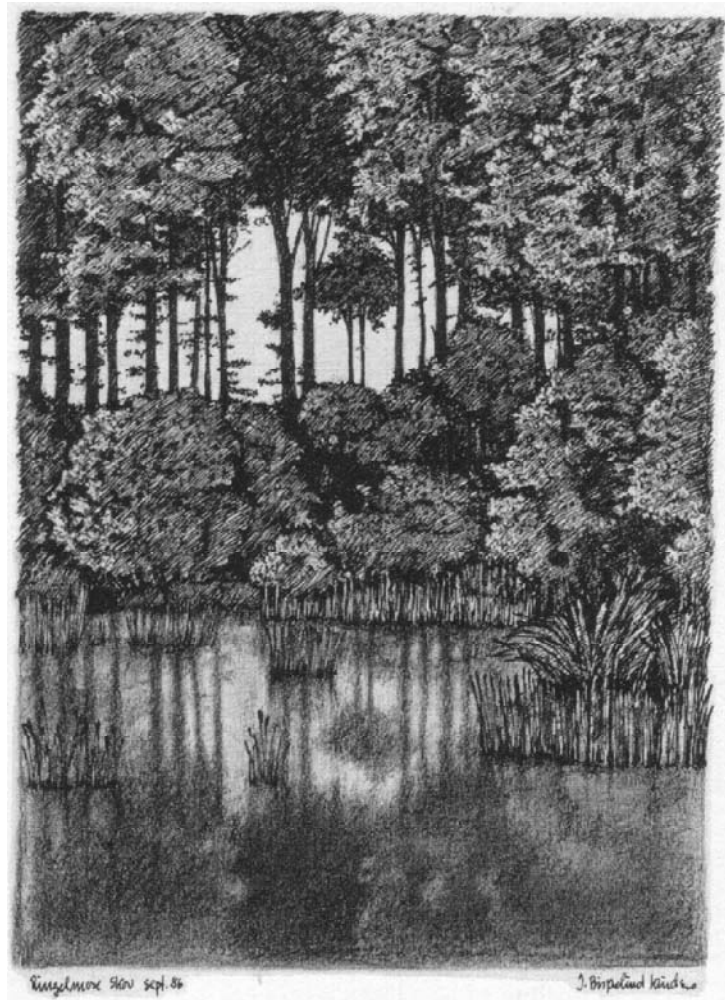
i went in once more to the empty
house whose gable was
tall as a fairytale
i sat out on the verandah
because my soul felt
larger than the body
that afternoon – the last winter
mosquitoes were dancing round
themselves like electrons
round an invisible core – i too
was trying to keep my memories intact

i was trying
apparently
to hold on to
the past by undertaking
certain inversions and backward movements
in the text
i was trying to hold on to the past
by holding the
poem up as a mirror that pointed
backwards but it was of course only
memory i
thus mirrored and
not bygone time

i also used other methods – for
example it is very noticeable that
the past is my favourite tense
i literally conjugated the verbs
back to what had happened and often
even further back right into the
pluperfect's violet infinity to come to that

the first sky hung in the east room on an outer wall the opposite side was covered with ivy – it had been painted in watercolours by an amateur who had used too much ultramarine but i had often felt secure under precisely that sky so far away from death

at this point in time i began quite naturally to read 'in search of time past' because it was precisely the track i had entered on and because my former practice had led me to certain points of view concerning time and the problematics that arose when time and art were brought together



somewhere else (in
a sonnet as far as
i recall) i had claimed
that the poem was probably in time
but that time was not in the poem
via other routes
i had reached the same point of
view as proust
had adopted: that time could be
fixed by art – that time in
a certain way could
be conquered
by art

but the further i pushed in along
 'swann's way' the
 more i realised
that proust had made a crucial
 error – by only taking
 the past into account
this by congruence ended up
 covering the present (like a
 laterna magica) and he oblit
erated his own immediate existence
which as is known was also the case

 what i meant
 quite precisely was:
 if i was to
recall to myself the hour that had
just past exactly in every detail
 it would take exactly
one hour – namely the succeeding
 hour which would
thus be obliterated by memory
(how was this hour that had just
 passed to be recalled by
 the way as anything
else than a constant repetition?)

so it was therefore
not so strange that
proust retired from
life clad in string gloves and felt shoes
to a room insulated with sheets of
cork in order to
dedicate himself to the eternal repetition
of past time
in his own way he had conquered
time but in doing so also life
marcel proust was maybe
bizarre but in truth
also consistent

the second sky had hung in the
bedroom where death marked
my mother – it was a black chalk
drawing of a dismal winter
landscape long before i came
into the world by my paternal
grandmother who had chosen
a brown passe partout as a frame –
the second sky thus spanned
almost a century



11/2 17.30 the sky looked like this: lavender blue right up at the top edge cyclamen in the middle and apricot-coloured just above the horizon – almost too beautiful like the memory of someone dead on the power lines the silhouette of five bullfinches formed the note pattern of 'bernie's tune' as a tribute to gerry mulligan

the second improvisation on
time – i woke up in
the middle of the night and said:
studebaker – the following day
i thought of the fact
that people then
really used to
ride around in studebakers
whereas today nostalgics
ride around in ‘stude
bakers’ – then
we really listened to ornette coleman
whereas today we listen to ‘ornette coleman’

i am not a nostalgic
because i
really lived the part
used to play the b-flat trumpet
even the cornet
tried to
look like don cherry
i don’t have to
re-experience the
time as quotations
don’t have to place an entire
era in quotation marks

people really rode around in stude
bakers or whatever they
were called chevrolet and de soto
i think it was – since i do not
live backwards this does
not interest me all
that much – let those people who
were not part of it then interest
themselves in both
'studebaker' and 'de soto'
or listen to 'ornette coleman' they
are sure to remember it much better

in the morning i had a headache
as if a huge high
pressure area had
gathered inside my brain – never
theless i jotted down
these sporadic obser
vations in a poem: 'pale blue sky
with grey clouds like wedge
wood porcelain' so that from
now on it should be possible to read
one's way to the sky above ulstrup

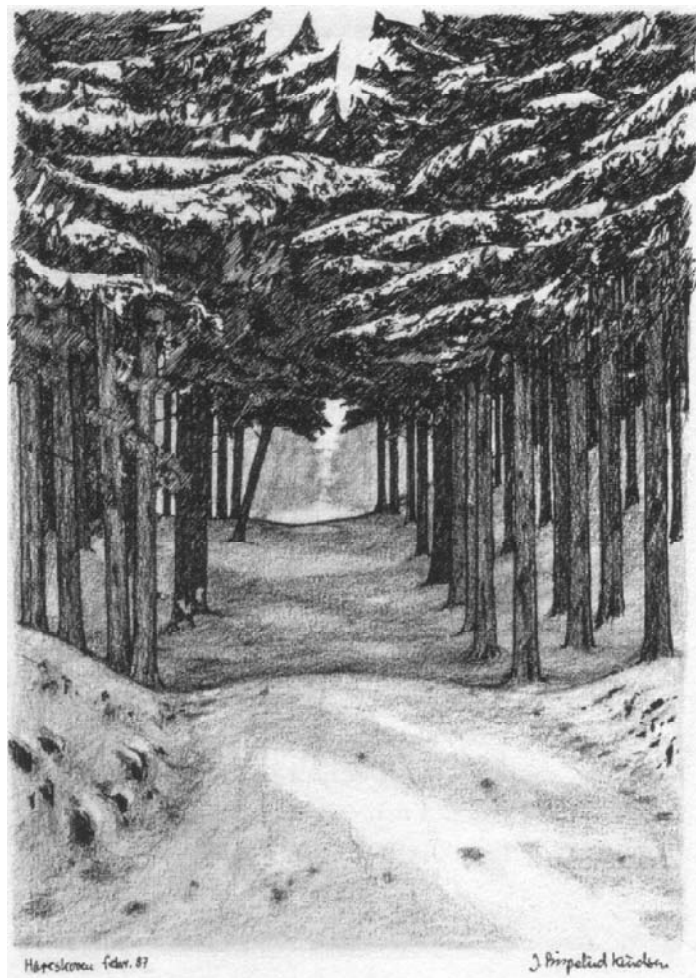
if my hypothesis
was right: that time
did not pass in the poem
then it was the most certain way to
'capture' the past strangely enough
to fix the now as
scrupulously as possible in the poem
this would (for reasons
i will return to) however not
involve writing exclusively
in the present or
registering with
photographic accuracy

so i agreed
with proust
that time could
be fixed by art but disagreed
then with him in his attempt
to hold on to 'combray'
with the aid of memory alone
for proust also had
to leave his room from time to time
in order to verify certain details in
his account
(blossoming haw
thorn for example)

the crux of the matter was of
course what i conceived
as the now and since
the answer to this question would
also indirectly be an
answer to what art
was i had to go about things carefully –
which meant i would
hardly be able to come up
with a positive definition but perhaps
in a roundabout way a negative one

i imagined that the sky in three
days' time would be as white as
jackson pollock's picture: white
light – and why did i imagine th
at? – because white was the mo
st likely colour in the middle of
february: a sky whiter than cig
arette paper – but now i would
have to see

was i slowly in
the process of en
tangling myself in
a net of past and future (a green
nylon net like the one my mother
used to cover the
redcurrant bushes with in summer)
were past and
future being intertwined in such a
fine-meshed net the knots of which
formed the
present where i
now found myself?



it seemed difficult to me for example
to separate exactly the images of
memory from those of the notion –
they often merged like red and
green pieces of glass which as known form
a surface of impenetrable black
was the now such an opaque pane?

let me so as to make it easier to under
stand make things more concrete:
the notion of
what i had undertaken in
the kitchen ten
minutes ago and
the notion of what i would
undertake in the
next ten minutes were
they so easy to separate? had i switched
on the light or would i do so shortly?

i could of course go out into the kitchen
and check whether the light
was switched on but who
was to guarantee that it was me who
had switched it on or
off? – to cut a long
story short i took an extinguished
candle from the sideboard's
silver and blew it out
i could also have put a burning
match to it if it had been lit

third improvisation on time
when gerry mulligan recorded
'moonlight in vermont' it was in
new york beneath a blipping neon
tube and it was over
cast in vermont – it could
also be put another way: moon
light had long since been invented
however – and that is
the point no one
had ever heard moonlight before
at any rate not on a baritone sax

i continued on
the sly so to speak
my wanderings
or readings along 'swann's way'
but two things invariably happened
each time i tried
firstly i got a headache
and secondly
these paths did not so much
take me backwards into the
past as
forwards into
the future

this latter phenomenon
did not surprise me
both because i had
thought precisely about how
difficult it was to separate memory
from notion
(they were practically intertwined)
and because i found
myself in a period where i had
decided to move in such a way
that the future
would naturally
occupy my mind



the former symptom however – the head
ache or migraine – worried me more
could it be due to a physical illness or rather
to a mental anxiety about the past
because my mother had died two months earlier
or was it quite simply due to my using
wrong glasses for the far too small typography?

in any case
'in search of lost time'
was taking me in the
opposite direction in
search of future time –
when i had read how
proust used to sit in his
attic room i imagined
how i in the space of
less than a month would be
sitting in the attic of the empty house
leafing through my childhood books

in my mind's eye i saw how in the
bottom of a persil carton
i found an old photo
graph of myself stained with paprika
and detergent and that i
said: 'can it really
be true?' – and that i understood my
doubts perfectly well –
for what a face
what a place what a truth
was i to compare it with?

or with the lens of my inner eye
i took a picture where
i was leafing through
doré's illustrated bible and once more
was surprised at 'the
crucifixion's' mighty
sky while wondering at the same
time whether this
negative of the
notion would ever be able to be
developed in the darkroom of the memory

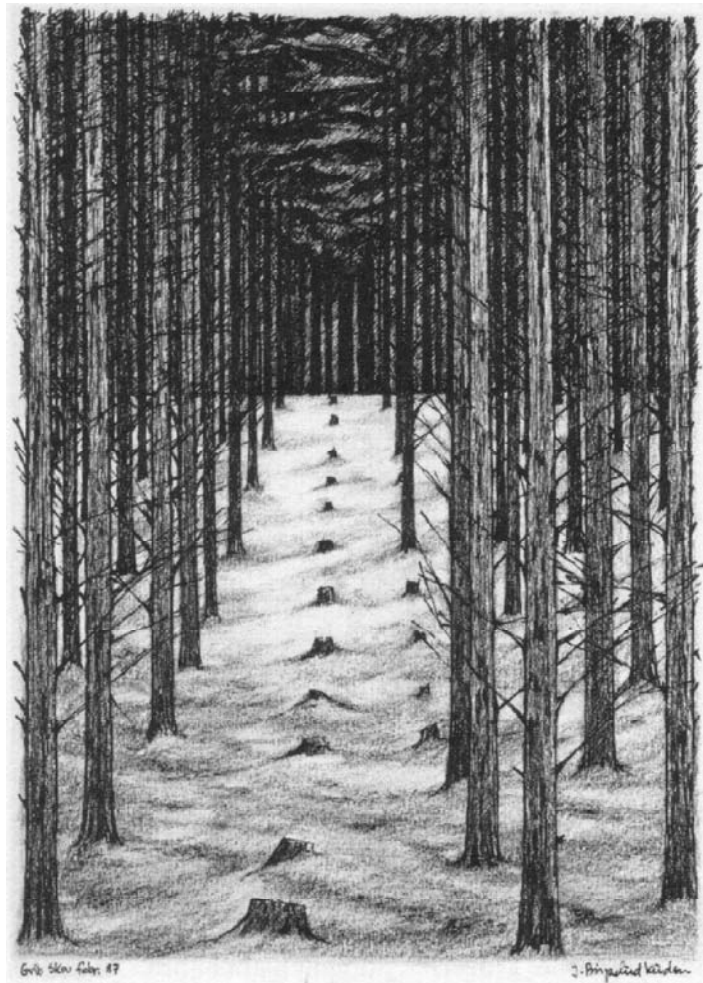
at any rate the
notion also
resembled the memory
in that taken to its ultimate con-
clusion it would erase the present
if i imagined
complete in every detail what
i would undertake
for an hour (and an hour onwards
from that) it would take precisely
an hour (the previous one)
and thereby erase an
hour from my life

so it looked as if
past and future
did not only share
the characteristic of both being
fictions but that they also in a
certain way corroded
the present like rust if they did
not actually obliterate
it (like the pictures that covered
the empty places in a photo album
under the opaque
ness of the
silk paper)

the third sky was painted by p c
skovgård with white cumulus cl
ouds over a reproduction on the
reverse of which was written: ze
aland lane – the third sky lay on
a table in the cellar between the
oil-fired central heating and a tu
b with dried flowers – it was a s
ubterranean sky that shed light
on my mother's memory

i imagined to myself that the sky on the first of march would be salmon-pink rather like my mother's underwear and that the clouds would rise like devil-fish over the horizon – where did these fish come from? – from thøger larsen's poems or an earlier imagining that i now confused with the future?

20/2 15.05 the sky looked like this: sky-blue like the cover on my selected poems – torn halfway by a jetstream that forever separated the past and the future from each other like two pieces of cardboard moving in their separate directions frayed and white at the edges with pain



for the third time i went in to
my mother's deserted
house where time passed
slowly as in the middle of a ruby
i considered the lumber
of decades in the garage
i could just as well move
into this present
and spread the memories
in these poems rather than constantly
journey between past and future

i could just as
well get it over
with stop this
whistling in the pipes this never-
ending inner waterfall in the
radiators
make sure of stopping this creaking
and knocking in
the mahogany furniture stop
the backward movement of the past
what in the
whole wide world
was i waiting for?

perhaps i hesitated about discarding
things because the past
was connected with them
because they were the past's
real hiding-place
(as proust believed)
perhaps my mother's soul was still
concealed in certain of
the objects she was
most fond of – in the small
chinese porcelain teapot for example?

but when i picked up the tea
pot and looked at
the spout and handle that
had been reinforced with tin
i knew quite well
that all it contained
was old jubilee coins i knew
quite well that there
was nothing left
except for these pangs of the heart that
would also pass off one fine day

so it was both pointless to attempt in such
a way to hold on to the past
because it was really a waste of time
and also unhealthy because it
meant living backwards because it was
to enter into a spiral of repetitions
that would finally only gleam like silver paper

or was i waiting for the seconds
to join together to form
a sufficiently large
amount that would then manifest
themselves as a mean-
ingful moment (as when rain
drops suddenly coalesce on a
window pane and run down)
did i really not
know that i myself was responsible
for the decision every single second?

24/2 11.05 the sky resembled the fin-
nish flag when i leaned my head bac-
kwards and looked directly into the
zenith when i knew quite well that t-
he kingdom of heaven did not exist s-
omewhere behind the clouds the sky
on the twenty-fourth of february co-
uld have been signed by jasper joh-
ns on the reverse



i decided to
spend the night
in my mother's house so
as to thwart the past by filling
it with my presence my cigarette
smoke my foot
steps over the persian carpets
my shadow
over the walls my rattling with the
spanish set of porcelain in
this
deathly
silence

and exactly on the stroke of twelve i
stood in front of the
family's old pier glass
decorated with gryphons and vine leaves
carved out of oak in order
to see if my mother would
walk again clad in her white quilted
silk dressing gown – but
there was nobody in
the mirror except for myself
perhaps she didn't remember me any more?

i ought to have listened to beethoven now
probably 'the moonlight
sonata' because
my mother had been specially fond of
it – but i did not
do so i steeled
myself and put on a tape with
eric dolphy on
the recorder that
i had brought along myself
precisely just in case

and why did i do that? – there were
both rational and
irrational reasons
firstly i wanted to counteract
a growing nostalgia
(and what could be
less nostalgic than eric dolphy?)
and secondly
it was not
particularly the issue of the past that
interested me but that of time

i had got the fixed idea that
precisely jazz of all
art forms was most
closely linked to the problems that
surrounded both the concept
of time and that time which
could be called existence because jazz
quintessentially sought
to dissolve the difference
between life and art by constantly
wanting to be contemporaneous

as far as the irrational reasons were
concerned it was of course
in the nature of things that
i could only guess at some of them
and i guessed
that one of them
constituted a final defiance of my
mother's wishes and
hopes that i
would follow her in her
tastes and points of view

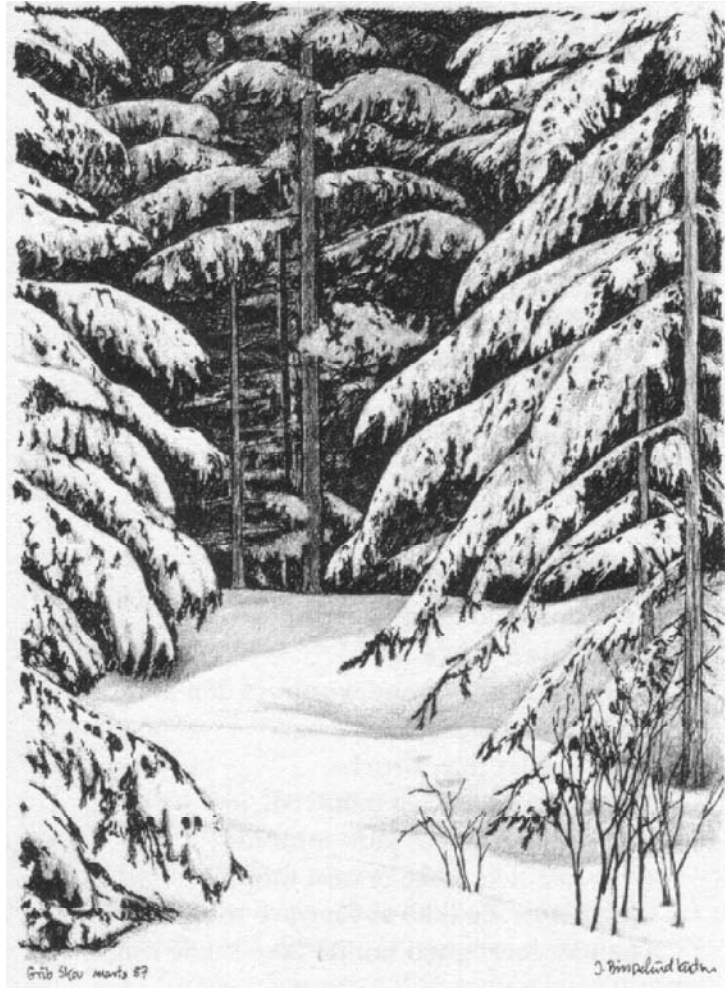
but i listened then to eric
dolphy instead
of to ludwig van
beethoven while the moon shone
in its urn of
ruby glass i
listened a little absent-mindedly
to eric dolphy's
'green dolphin street'
while i concentrated on
the fourth improvisation on time

the fourth improvisation on time –
as long as eric
dolphy was alive there could
not be a final version of
‘green dolphin street’
because jazz is
by nature a constant improvi-
sation on time – that which in
another key
could also
be called a never-ending approxi-
mation towards perfection

therefore eric dolphy took the chance
every time he
played ‘green dolphin street’ –
that is the secret of jazz
that it seeks to
hold on to the
irrevocable before it declines
into art – that is why eric
dolphy put his
life on the line
every single time he
played ‘green dolphin street’

eric dolphy realised the simple
fact that no work of
art can contain life – that is why
he played for dear life
so as to overcome
the strange paradox
that his whole life was jazz
but that jazz is not life
as soon as it
has been played
and recorded on a record
like ‘green dolphin street’

the second night i
lit the candles in the
five-branch bronze candlestick
and invoked my mother’s
name five times – but
of course she did not blow
the candles out and i also knew
quite well that i had to
stop these childish under
takings i had unfortunately grown
far too old to believe
in fairytales any longer



traumas larger than the black
plastic sacks i stuffed
my mother's diaries
into blocked the happy
recurrence
(symbolically enough
even the toy train tracks up in
the attic had rusted)
the french balcony
doors which it would be far too
late to open anyway were shut for good

never again would
i look through the
dirty panes of
prohibition and even if i did so
yet again there would be no one
on the other side
lying naked in the sun with a
mount of venus so
beautiful as only i could recall it
i would never reach the point of
understanding
my mother's fear
and loneliness

the third night i placed a
photograph of my mother
in front of me – again
i ought to have respected the last
wish of the deceased and
played max bruch's
violin concerto – for i no longer
needed to pretend that
i did not love my mother
i did not need to defend myself any longer
her love could not harm me any more

i cannot deny that i felt myself erotically
stimulated by looking at this
picture of my mother when young – this
could be due to my usual preference for
the dead but it could also be a final
attempt to resurrect her or the memory
of her by means of this bodily contact

why could she not
have been just as
happy as she seemed to be
at that age? – why had
she wept every time she
heard the adagio in
max bruch's violin concerto?
why had she
shut herself in her
sleeping beauty's palace? – i would
never get the answer to
these hermetic questions

why did my migraine get worse? – had
i taken it over from
my mother as a
reminder not to forget her?
why did a cactus
that had not been
watered for half a year suddenly
blossom in its
death throes? – why
was i sleeping so badly? – i would
never understand these hermetic answers



but i pulled myself
together and put
a tape with stan getz
on the recorder – there were both
scratches on the record with bruch's
violin concerto (great
flaws in the happiness) and it was also
important for me to
underline my conception of the nature
of jazz – i advanced stan getz'
living saxophone
against max
bruch's dead violin

the fifth improvisation on
time – initially
i couldn't stand stan getz –
it seemed to me that
he either played
a note too much
or a note too few
that stan getz played
as if he was not
afraid of anything
initially i wasn't all that keen
on saxophones at all

and i was seized by the
feeling that the
more spontaneous stan
getz improvised
the more
predictable
his playing became – the
more purely the
notes fell like
the one
raindrop
after the other

and the thought struck
me that the
more stan getz
tightened his style
the more
unpredictable
his playing became
the more beautifully
the rain
drops fell
like the one note
after the other

then i didn't think
about that
any more – i forgot
stan getz for more
than twenty years
i did not poke
my nose any more into
either stan getz's life or
his tenor playing –
i didn't care
whether he played in
stockholm or stuttgart

that at any rate is how
i remember that
i already remembered it
back then – is that memory
so far removed from
what is past that
it is more the forgetting
that i remember?
is it simply
a handful
of sham emeralds i have
thrown up for grabs here?

however that may be
 one fine day
i was caught even
so on the wrong foot
 'holy moses how
 beautifully that saxo
phone player blows his horn'
i exclaimed – ' who
 is it'
 it is stan
getz along with his belgian
quartet was the answer

 the last night
 (the night before the
 estate was to be divided)
i gave up trying to keep my mother's
soul in its midst – after all
 when it came to it
it was only this secret
 suction that was
still keeping all these bureaus
and empire chairs together
 it was only
 the spider's webs
 behind the paintings



i opened a copy of
andersen's fairytales
before it was too late
for the pieces of furniture to take
leave of each other and there they
could do so undisturbed
by reality: 'ich werde erst
froh wenn wir in
der weiten welt draussen sind'
it said in german – for it was
precisely a german
edition my
mother had owned

i was not up to saying goodbye myself
instead i grew angry with all these
mirrors and bureaus that had failed to
make my mother feel secure – instead i
punished them or did i punish myself because
i had left her to loneliness or was it my
mother i punished because she had abandoned me?

my childhood home
would at any rate
drift apart the next
morning like a great shipwreck
on the waters of the heart – and
it was just as well
because the painful precision of
the facts stood in
the way of the memory – before
going to bed i let
lee morgan
sound the retreat
on his silver trumpet

1/3 7.00 the sky was not salmon
pink like my mother's bra it wa
s greyish white like a dirty stuc
co ceiling and it was the same l
ater at 19.00 but now lit up by t
he floodlights from charlottenlu
nd trotting track over behind t
he wood

the fourth sky i had painted my
self as a boy with my paintbox –
it was one of the rainy weather s
kies i obviously had also been fon
d of before i began to read verlai
ne – it was hanging above a built
in cupboard which now only cont
ained books – no the fourth sky h
ung above the heart

should i have salvaged just one
 'memory' from this
 great shipwreck against
the rock of time – a horseshoe
 for example or
 my first children's boots
or something more prosaic: the
 cocktail shaker of
 stainless steel?
i should not have done so because
memories are not of this world

four nights in a row i had
 slept in the ghost house
 without succumbing
to the supernatural powers
 on the contrary
 i had chased them out into
various fairytales and legends
 and since the house
 no longer was decked out
and swept the seven impure spirits
would never find their way back again



the following night i wrote in my
dreams perhaps my best
poem but later on
i was unsure since i had
written so much
about dream and reality
that i could hardly distinguish
them from each other
and because i had
written so many poems that i hardly
knew what a poem was any more

when i read myself in along 'swann's
way' it was
really more
marcel proust's contemporaneousness i
was looking for
than that past
he himself imagined he was
pursuing that past
which so definitively
lost itself along the paths in the
rosegardens he did not mention

so it was not so much
the subject matter of
his narrative – the past –
that commanded my interest as
those places in the text where he
strayed into the poems
and novels of other writers
because that showed that
proust instinctively knew even so
where he was going to find the past
namely in art
the works where
time does not pass

when proust quoted
the line of paul desjardins
'black is the distant wood
the sky though still blue'
he introduced then a time
horizon that did not
simply reach behind his own
memory but that was
also far more precise
in its trustworthiness
than any
memory could be

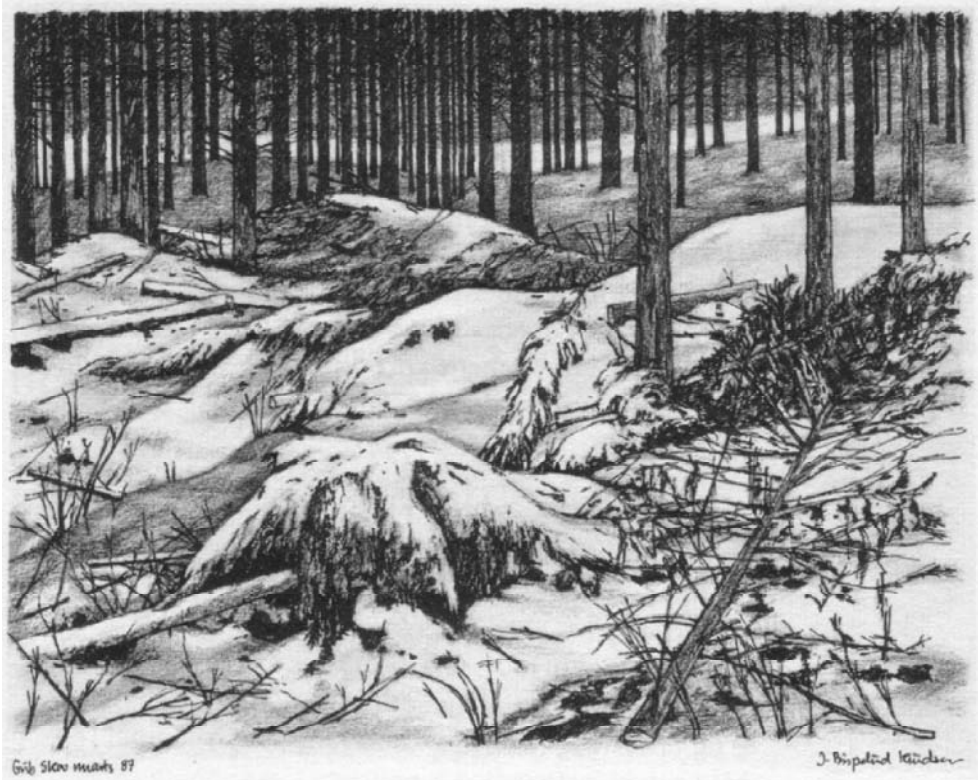
now it was time
itself that proust sought to
conquer so it could obviously
not serve any purpose to
quote exclusively
from other works of art
because in doing so he
would only fix the past
even though the same past
had just been
present when
it was created

but what i believed
i had realised
was that proust
had glimpsed the fundamental
solution to the problem even though
as far as he was
concerned he did not strangely
enough heed
this solution but focused
on memory instead of on
the now in his
attempt to
fix time

just how deeply these excursions
into the labyrinths
and lacunae of memory
affected me i realised when
my migraine was replaced by
a mysterious eczema which
could only be due to an excessive
tension of the spirit
because the soul was searching
too far away from the body roaming
through dry places on the edge of time

the state could also be characterised
as an inflammation
of the spirit quite
literally a self-combustion because
the soul in its remembering
was only focusing on
itself on its own notions
and memories which
were not disturbed by
the corrections of any outer reality
the state could be called a spiritual incest

i imagined a blue sky with
clouds bound together like
a bouquet of white lilies co
uldn't this mental image ju
st as well be one of memor
y's displacements so that
idea and memory (future a
nd past) ultimately caught
up with each other's tail c
losed like a circle round th
e present?



i took the decision
to move into my
mother's house
not so as to occupy it but
spread the memories and place
them there where
they properly belonged:
out on the horizon
inside the gratitude behind
glass and oval frames
on diverse
cupboards
and shelves

i decided to conquer the
illusions of
past and future
by filling the house with present
from attic to
cellar – for only
through the now is time conquered
because this now
becomes past one
fine day in a future – only
through time time is conquered

i thought of saying goodbye to nord
skoven with the 'les adieux' sonata by
beethoven but i did not do so
i had had enough of the past for quite
some time into the future – i didn't even go
out there it was too late – it would no
longer be nordskoven i was saying goodbye to

so it was chet baker who got
the last note
here in ulstrup
chet baker's flügelhorn that
sounds like faded
poppies long
before they yet have shown
as much as
a corner of
their crinoline – so it was
chet baker who blew røsnæs red

it amused me in passing when i later
read at odd moments from my poem
collection 'the skies' that i had brought
together such diverse personages in
the text as marcel proust and chet baker
for the reader that appreciates the one
is sure not to care for the other and vice versa

at other times i imagined
that the reader would
come across the name
'paul desjardins' – who can that be?
i could hear him
asking himself
and perhaps looking the name up in
the dictionary
without finding it
was it a little bit malicious
of me or just a fancy of mine?



sixth improvisation on
time – i wanted
to write a poem that was
going to be called free jazz
apart from
alto saxophones
it was to contain march's
white light – if such a poem
were carried out to
the letter according
to plan it would be an act of
freedom a poem of freedom

if not it would be a completely
different poem than
the one i had planned to write
and would therefore be more of
an unintentional one
in order to write
such a poem of freedom
all i needed then was to
repeat this poem
word for word – but
there was no reason to do that
for it had already been written

i sat outside under ulstrup's
sky and looked at the
clouds which constantly
changed shape and appearance as
clouds do – the scene
reminded me of a
poem i had written a long time
ago and scrapped again
i could remember
the poem but not the words – what
was it then that was in the memory?

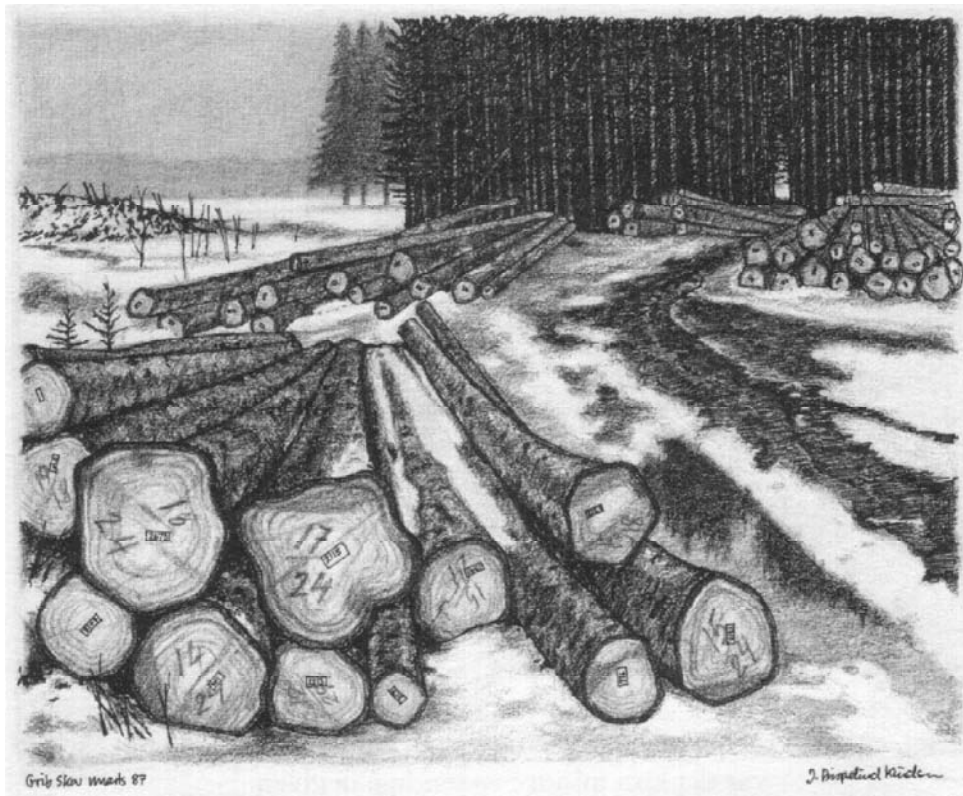
they were cumulus clouds (rare at
this time of year around the forty
martyrs' day) and they dispersed at
apparently the same speed as my
thoughts – drifted out of sight on
the west wind – out of
memory or into memory?

the cloud i was observing right now
and which looked like a white
camel would it
remain in my mind or
would it disappear
without trace in
the desert of oblivion – was there
a law that
governed
these events or was it
blind chance that ruled?

could memories also be consigned to oblivion?
would it occur after a certain number
of years or quite suddenly as when a candle
is blown out – did it depend on chance
whether i would remember a look my mother
had sent me on some special occasion
did time run its course without mercy in the memory?

was it only less important events
that would be completely consigned
to oblivion? – how was it that i could
recall so exactly a particular pine
floorboard in røsnæs church
but maybe not the most loving words
i had ever said to my mother?

these were important
questions – partly in
themselves and partly
because they shed light on why
i placed such great emphasis on
art (especially
the poem) because only there
could time
be fixed only in the poem could time
be conquered only in art did time
not pass
once it had
been set



so the one who listened
to the 'waldstein' sonata
reheard that very now that
beethoven then had
brought to a halt between
the notes' magic signs
the one who listened to
the 'waldstein' sonata could
or had at any rate the
possibility to be able to
experience the contemp
oraneousness of the moment

it was the combination of these two factors: that the 'hammerklavier' sonata was in time but that time was not (did not pass i really ought to say) in the 'hammerklavier' sonata which made this experience possible which made it possible to hear a brief moment of past time

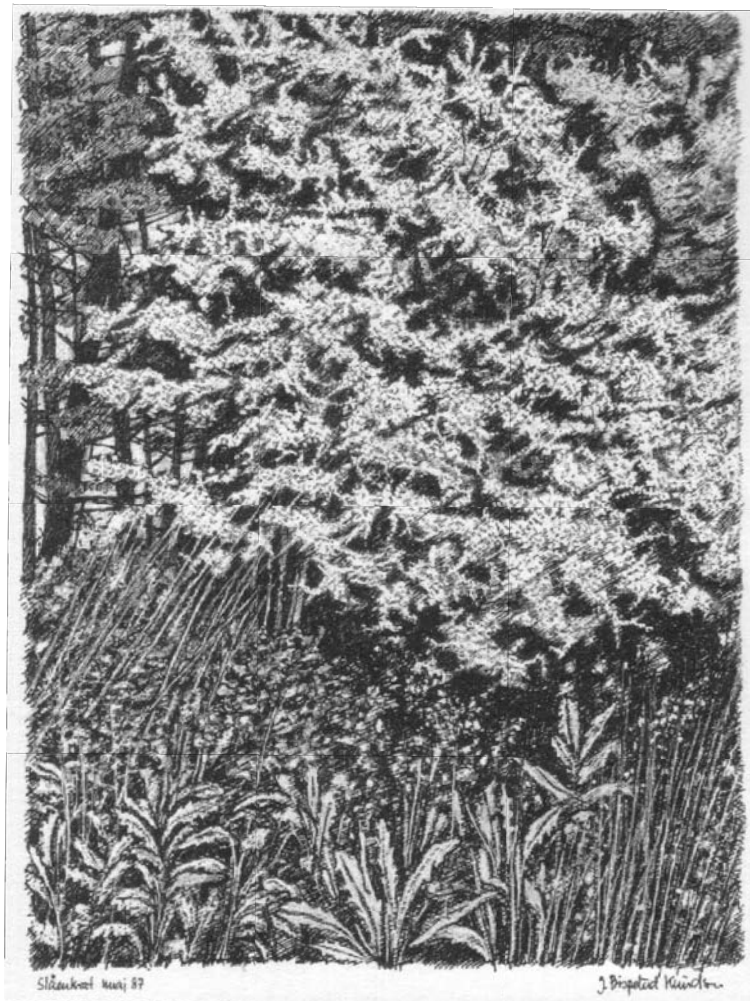
so it was not time that passed in the 'quasi una fantasia' sonata but the listener's own time while he or she heard how the andante changed into the adagio to end in the allegro 'quasi una fantasia' took its time – one could say – it took its time from the listener who in the meantime had become fifteen minutes older

13/3 11.35 the sky was green
with migraine with a single l
ark already there in the far n
orthwest corner where there
is otherwise nothing – i tried
to change the sky's colour to
aquamarine with the aid of t
hree aspirins

when i reached the cathedral of
hawthorn on 'swann's
way' i also was
intoxicated with bliss at
this sparkling whiteness
this catholic bush
because it reminded me of my
own hawthorns at
the hermitage one
early morning when i myself
entered among the small white altars

but the reflection put a
spoke in the wheel it irked me
that proust's relationship to
memory was so logical or
rather chronological
that he for long passages
let the events succeeded
each other in a
certain order and connection
as in the course
of time which as we all
know is irreversible

it gradually irritated me
as i reached
'swann in
love' that the events succeed
each other almost as
in reality – was it
the text that had assumed
control over memory
little by little
the text – the prose that comes from
pro-versa: 'the forward-looking'?



why did marcel
proust's text not
reflect to a far
greater extent memory's working
method – memory's disconnectedly
illogical and
unchronological sequence? – was it
in reality not
at all the track 'in search of lost time'
that proust was following
but the
actual track of
the text 'the narrative track'?

try yourself to remember
a particular series of
events and notice
how disconnectedly the associa-
tions present themselves and
in what a random
sequence – don't they? – might
it possibly be that
poetry was a far better medium for
the unfolding of memory? – verse
that comes from
vers: to turn
(back)?

the fifth sky the removal peo-
ple had for some reason or ot-
her allowed to hang as the si-
ngle reminiscence on the firs-
t floor – i do not recall having
seen it before but it must hav-
e hung there for a long time i
could see from oblivion's nico-
tine edges when i took it down

yes precisely the outlines of
the objects that had hung
on the wallpaper the marks
in the carpet felt from the
furniture that had stood there
the nails in the wall the bare
spots where it had been painted
round a shelf gave sustenance
to both oblivion and memory –
oblivion by the
omissions – memory by
sharpening its powers of imagination

in the same way as
the booming
silence that now
filled the empty rooms referred to
my mother who had filled them
with sounds not
all that long ago (the rasping of
a nail file for example)
in the same way as every
negation is intimately
linked to
that which
is denied

just as the opposite
was clearly also
the case i looked at
the aura of absence that radiated
around the few things i had
allowed to remain
because of their material
value (a lamp of
ruby glass a shrewsbury grandfather
clock etc) as if they were already
bathed in
their own
destruction

what sort of call was it
from room to room? – what
sort of echo was it up
through the hall from cellar
to attic? – what sort of
a resonance was it between
things that no longer existed
and objects that would soon
be gone? – it was of course
the span of time
across the middle of the moment
at whose centre i myself stood

or rather i was sitting in the winter garden
under the light's crossed swords
listening to the chimes from skovshoved
church bell-tower – i heard time
falling in strokes that spread out like echoes
around the moment – i heard it with
my own ears and didn't understand a sound

what became of all these strokes
i mean what on earth became of them
with their rain-damp weekdays and their smell
of camphor – they couldn't just be deposited
in my memory – what about the strokes i hadn't
heard would others remember them?
what became of my mother then when i myself died?



'death's look is green with the
penetrating moistness of a
violet's leaf' neruda
had once written – i went
out to see if
it was true – it
was more than true – the violet's
look was green like
my mother's last look
before it broke and spread out in
all of memory's thousand colours

but the look which
i had really seen in her
eyes what had become
of that? – above what
sky did it now stand as
a gleaming rainbow – what
became of the moment
of truth the day that the church
bell buried the sun that
the cloud bore off? – no i
could not
make do with memory

on the other
hand i should
take care not
to try to understand what
time was – such an explanation
just had
to be there at a certain point in time
which
would mean that time could
contain its own explanation and
that was
a plain
stupidity

what was it then i wanted? – to embody
the moment in the poem – neither
more nor less i wanted to conquer time
that i had claimed was possible and
that i still maintained – that time did not
pass in the poem but only in life that art
and life were therefore separated by eternity

strangely enough i found
support for this viewpoint
from the opposite camp from
those who claimed that life
and art were inseparable
to such an extent that they
acted their lives when they
exercised their art
i was of course once more
thinking of the men of jazz
as the moment for them
was also sacred

and for the same reasons as mine
they well knew
that time could
only be conquered through the moment
but whereas i
saw it as an
enrichment and a redemption they
considered this fixation
to mark a decline
from life to art – in that way they too
conquered time but also the work of art



the seventh improvisation
on time
on 12 february 1952
art pepper drew
breath
i.e. he
played the saxophone
the result of this breath
ing can still be
heard on the records
xanadu one hundred and eight
and one hundred and seventeen

it must have been
hard work to
play through that
piece of life on that
february day – from
the early show to
the late show – it
is at any rate tiring
to listen to
a man drawing
breath for more than ninety
minutes non-stop

there were no tricks
in art pepper
no monkey-tricks
no easy fingerings
on the alto sax's
mother of pearl
art pepper knew that
there was only one way
to avoid
hard work –
and that was
by doing it

or as he said
to a
psychologist who thought
that he practised
too much:
'you can't
practise living'
art pepper knew
that life
when it
comes to it
only has one scale

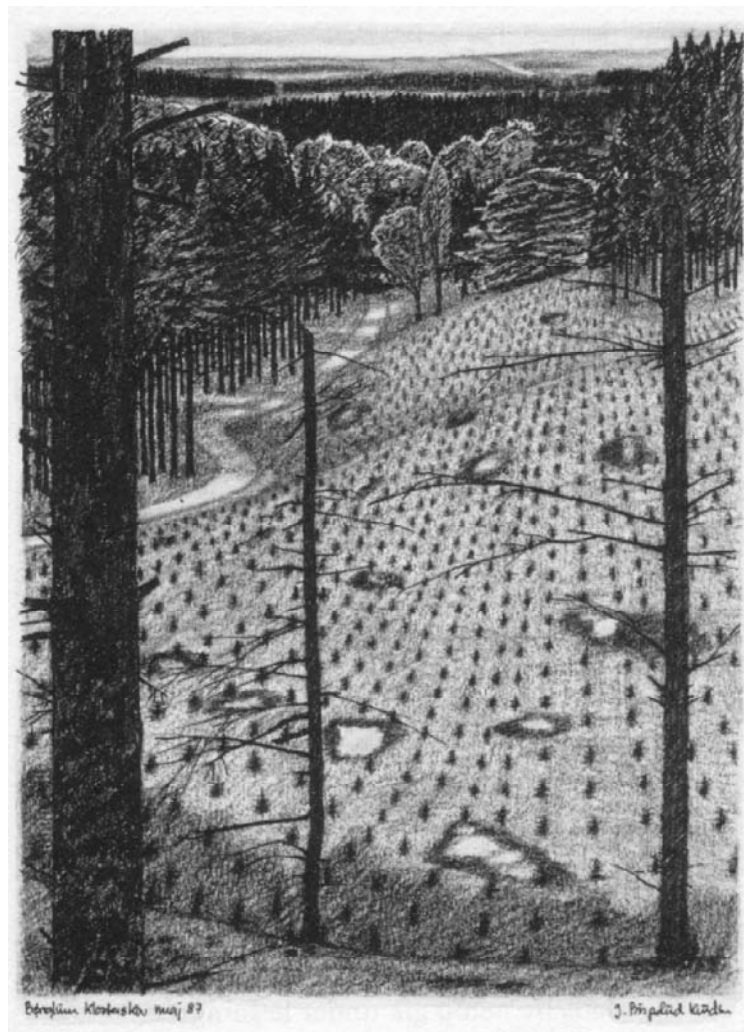
what he didn't know was
that there was a little
art pepper sitting inside art
pepper preventing him from
playing precisely
this grey-tone scale
and a very good thing too
for otherwise it would have been
impossible to hear the
art pepper who played
out of art pepper on thursday
18 july at village vanguard

that art pepper who suddenly
flew up from the saxophone
like a butterfly on the
evening of 29 july
at village
vanguard
that art pepper who made time
stop for a moment on saturday 30
july 1977 at village
vanguard so that this
second can be heard to this very day
on the contemporary records

the sixth sky with its nimbus clouds still hung above the empire sofa in its own golden age and yet again i rowed out on the small lake to the town of my dreams on the far shore during the storm – had i still not understood that it was reality that was to be realised?

22/3 11.17 the sky was once more white as the blossoming pear trees in the fairytale had i still not understood that it was not the fairytales that were to be made real but reality that was to be made a fairytale life's only real fairytale?

i imagined that the sky over
røsnæs would next morning
be varnished even whiter li
ke a hard edge painting by f
rank stella with razor-sharp
isobars – wasn't this notion
just a memory? weren't me
mories just notions? – i go
t confused – i was unable t
o definitively separate past
and future



in various rooms time had stopped – each clock
stood at its fixed point in time – the thomas
hay grandfather clock showed half past nine round
the clock and the jourdan clock a quarter to twelve –
but once each night and day the real time swept like a
wing of phosphorus over the dials and revealed the
deception – only the clocks had stopped

didn't precisely the same
happen in reality
to the poem: that once a year
it was revived
by the look of the
reader who swept over
the letters on the pages and
in this moment's contemporaneousness
revealed that it was
the poem (like the clock) that had
come to a standstill and not the reader
whose life precisely continued while reading?

once each night and day the clock showed the
right time even though it had stopped –
once a year the poem fitted the moment of
contemporaneousness the 'pathétique' was right –
once a life temporality and eternity met
at the same point – once a death the
deception was revealed that only time had stopped

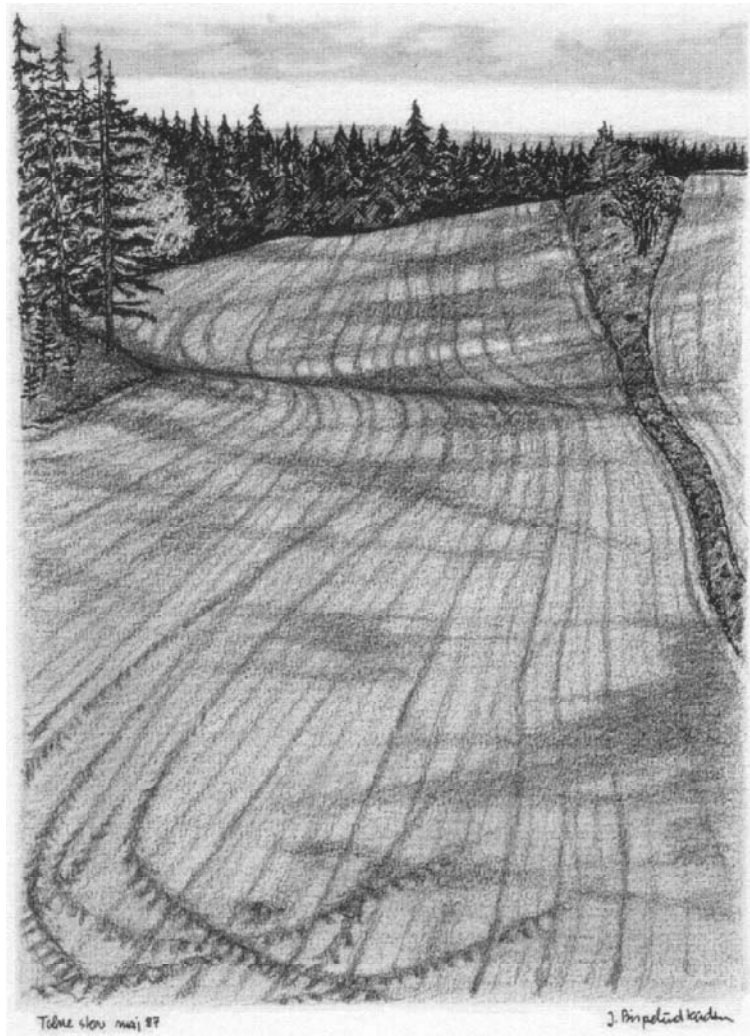
could the past be driven out
with brown soap or
memory be rectified
with the aid of household
ammonia? – that was
how the house smelt now
at any rate – but precisely that smell
of scouring powder conjured
up memories by
the dozen like ghosts from forgotten
chests of drawers and broom cupboards

could the memories be
covered over with alkyd paint
and the traumas be
repaired with polyfilla?
or would
the damp work
inside the brickwork
behind the wallpapers' hidden
patterns that
would suddenly
break out one day
like a secret ex libris?

i noticed that it was yellow
roses my mother
had embroidered
on the chair i got up from
only now did i see it
only now did time
sprinkle its gold leaf over
its petals
only now did their
moment come and they became unfor-
gettable as the roses from malmaison

but the migraine had moved to
the back of my head
where it now lay like a
great mass of clouds and looked
like a brain – i was still
forcing myself to listen
to jazz music instead of following
my desire and
playing 'der sturm' sonata
could that be due to the migraine or
to the fact that eldridge had just died?

or was it the
other way round?
did i get a migraine
because i was suppressing my desire
my desire to let my grief out
was that why
i listened to roy eldridge
under midnight's
parasol so as by devious detours
to air my pain even so?
why then did
i still have
a migraine?



i will only mention in passing the
difficulties proust
got embroiled in
in 'swann in love' – how
could he remember
the innermost feelings of
two other people? – the whole section
showed how intimately
memory and imagination
were intertwined like the carved
vine leaves in the narrative itself

what immediately interested me more on the other hand was the account of vinteuil's sonata for violin and piano because it was almost certain that this sonata was fictive and had therefore only been heard by proust's inner ear but it wasn't certain – vinteuil might have existed and he might have composed a sonata

it titillated my soul to investigate the matter – to look it up in various dictionaries and ask if anyone knew of a composer by the name of vinteuil knowing full well i would never get an unambiguous answer – was it the actual uncertainty that titillated my soul – i sensed that proust was close to the nature of memory in describing this sonata

proust must of course himself have known
whether vinteuil had existed or not
but that was not the point – the most important
thing for him as an artist was to
convey to the reader a notion of
and insight into how
memory worked for better or for worse

when i emptied the freezer of
gooseberries redcurrants
and blackcurrants the
thought struck me that each of
these carefully
packed plastic bags
perhaps represented the last
happy moments
in my mother's
life: hours of secret sunshine that
i was now uselessly defreezing

i could well see that my poems gradually
looked more like essays than poems
but that didn't bother me – on the contrary
i felt an irresistible urge to follow
language's least tip into areas (among the
gooseberry bushes) where i had
never been before – rather than write poems

in a way
i had never
attempted
to write poems in the ordinary
sense of the word the fact that
i had come to
do so was more due to
chance or
a direct accident rather than
happy inspiration i
had always
detested
'poems' as such

my intention
and real
driving force had
constantly been to answer god
a question which he had
certainly never
have asked me – and to that
end i had
found 'the poem' best suited
like the redcurrant bushes
answer na-
turally
with their berries

the seventh sky hung over
another picture which the
valuer thought had a high
er market value – but i pr-
eferred this somewhat tur-
bid sky perhaps because of
the church spire on the ho-
rizon? – it could maybe be
st hillaire? – the seventh s-
ky's signature had been sc-
ratched out for some reaso-
n or other



1/4 20.15 the sky looked like
an antique dish one of the k
inds of dish i had been hold
ing a couple of days earlier
wondering if i should keep it
because of its sentimental v
alue – but i let it slip back t
oo into oblivion's great spri
ng evening which perhaps
because of that gleamed so
strongly of tin

that i had got
rid of all my mother's
effects and
only kept a few
objects (a bronze
ash tray that was beautiful)
was because i
did not need
'memories' of her
that every time i looked
at them were to
remind me of her

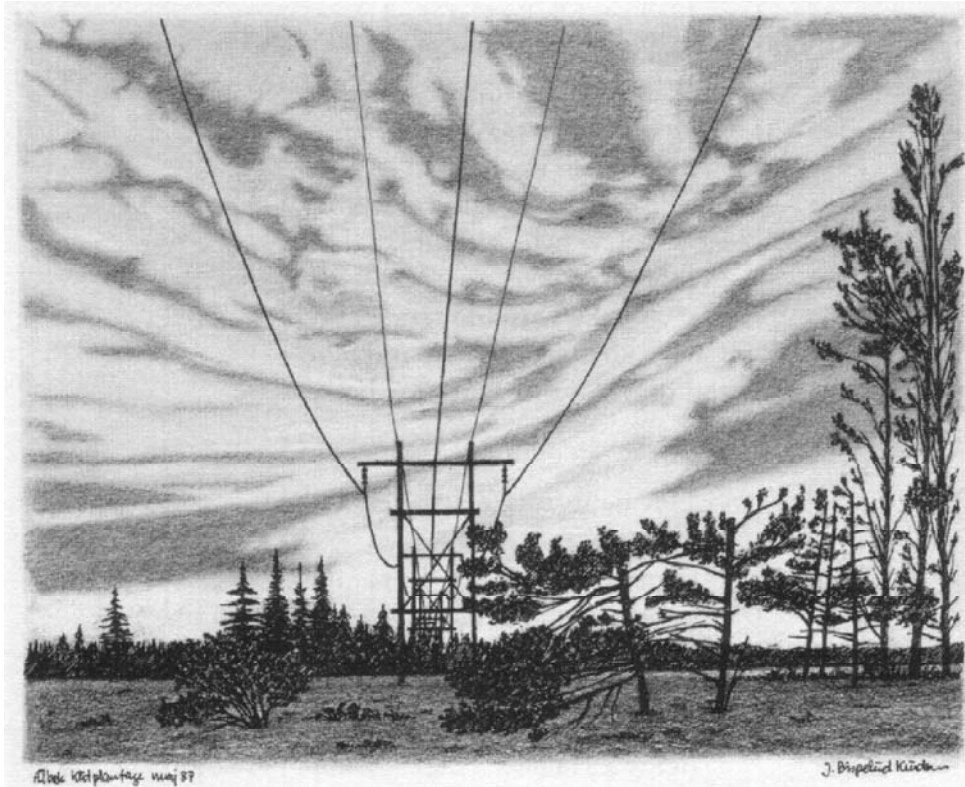
for the same reason i could just
as well have kept
all her possessions
because the memory of the present
point in time really
had become that which
the word itself emphasises: an intimacy
that was only
distantly related
to the outer scenery – that i sold all
of it even so was for practical reasons

the photographs
i kept of my
mother were also
by and large superfluous – photo
graphs of those we love are only
necessary while
they are still alive because the
photograph forms a
fixed point for our gaze
of those who are otherwise
constantly in
motion and
changing

whereas images of
loved departed ones
as mentioned are super
fluous because memory itself
is such an image of them
who no longer are
changing and in motion
so i only kept
the photographs of my mother
for other people's sake – so they
could see how
beautiful she
had been

a last word concerning my mother's effects:
the small miniature of beethoven in a
black lacquer frame i incorporated in my
future for its own sake and precisely
because i did not want to recollect it
just as i would also rather play
the 'pastoral' sonata than remember it

how could it be that the word
was only able in special
exceptional circumstances
to hold on to the moment?
how come that the
written word as soon
as it had been written totally
lost our interest and was
swept away with the time
it believed it had fixed on the paper
vanished as if it had never been written?



what became of yesterday's papers?
did they end up as wrapping
paper at the fishmonger's
in nordre frihavns-gade? – did we use
them to protect the floor when
we painted the rooms
with plastic paint? – could we
find them out at
the free port in the
great recycling warehouses when
the chestnuts had come into leaf?

what became of the weekly magazines with
their gaudy colours and
resplendent present?
in the dusty mausoleums of what
libraries should we
look for the periodicals'
bleached sun? – what became of all
the annual reports and
the statistical calcu
lations? – in what wastepaper baskets did
the past's most intimate confessions disappear?

what became of the legal yearbooks
and the police
registrations
of bike thefts and sexual
offences?
what became of
the great contemporary novels
with their social
commitment?
in what scrap paper and milk cartons
would we refind the past's spoken words?

how come that
precisely that
written word
which most believed it was most
occupied and concerned with the
moment vanished
as without trace as last year's
profusion of sea pink?
why was this word unable to hold
on to time? – because it was only
taken up with
time and thus
fell with time

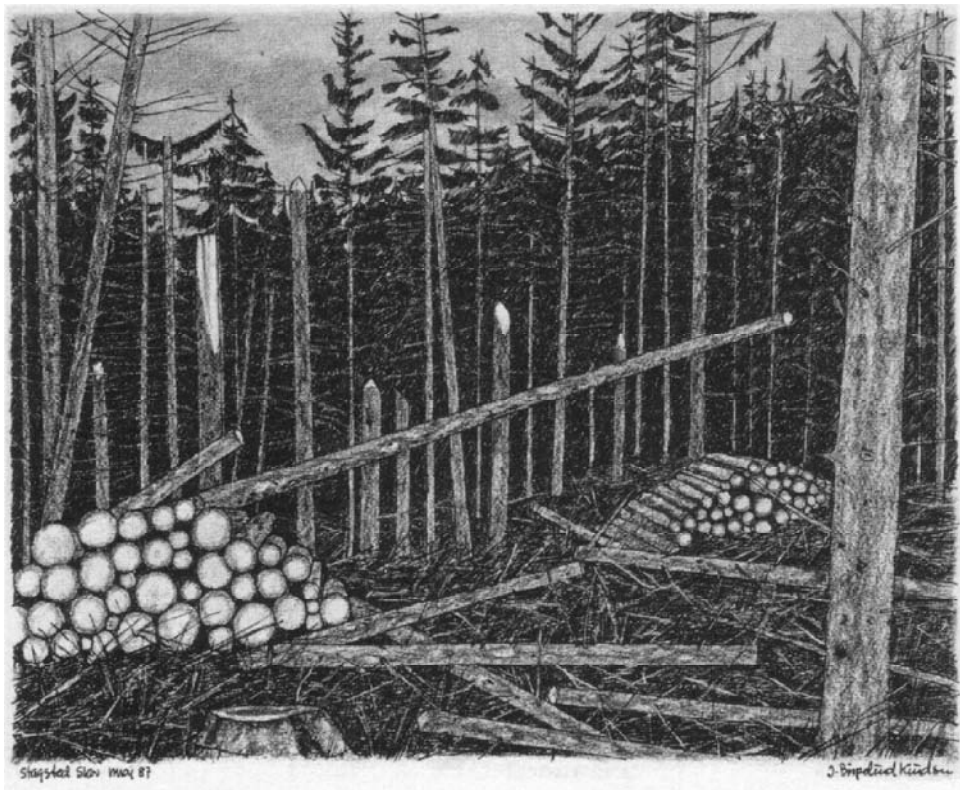
because this word
only wanted to hold
on to time through
time – because this word only
wanted to explain time by time
because this word
was not capable or able
to realise
that time could not contain
its own explanation
because this
word was
the dead word

if the moment only
turned out as it did
as a result of past and future
then time would explain itself
(since all time is
present) and nothing can
explain itself
where did the moment turn
into time from as the latter's
revelation as the scanning
of a verse we first
understood now?

i did not hesitate and my hand
did not shake
when i replied
with these incomprehensible words:
the moment
strikes time
like a blow from eternity – and
i did not
shrink when i
continued: so it is eternity that
explains time and not vice versa

this was the
true chronology
time from
moment to moment where
the bell of eternity sounded and
not the prolongation
of seconds into minutes and
years at one
extreme or the reduction to
hundred thousandths' quartz
at the other
extreme of
infinity

this was the
true time that
all great art
measured: time from moment
to moment from one eternity
to the next
for only thus could time be
conquered:
through the moment because
the moment lit up time
with its
mighty
electronic flash



this was the true point in time
where eternity
intersected
temporality in the moment
and at one and the
same time stopped time
in the poem and even so allowed
it to pass from poem
to poem from sonata
to sonata and this was the true
space of time where life took place

that was why
art and life
no matter how
different they were (separated
by eternity) could not do without
each other even so
because the one fixed the points
in time while the other
unfolded the spaces of time between
them for what would a stroke of time
be without time
and time without
a stroke of time?

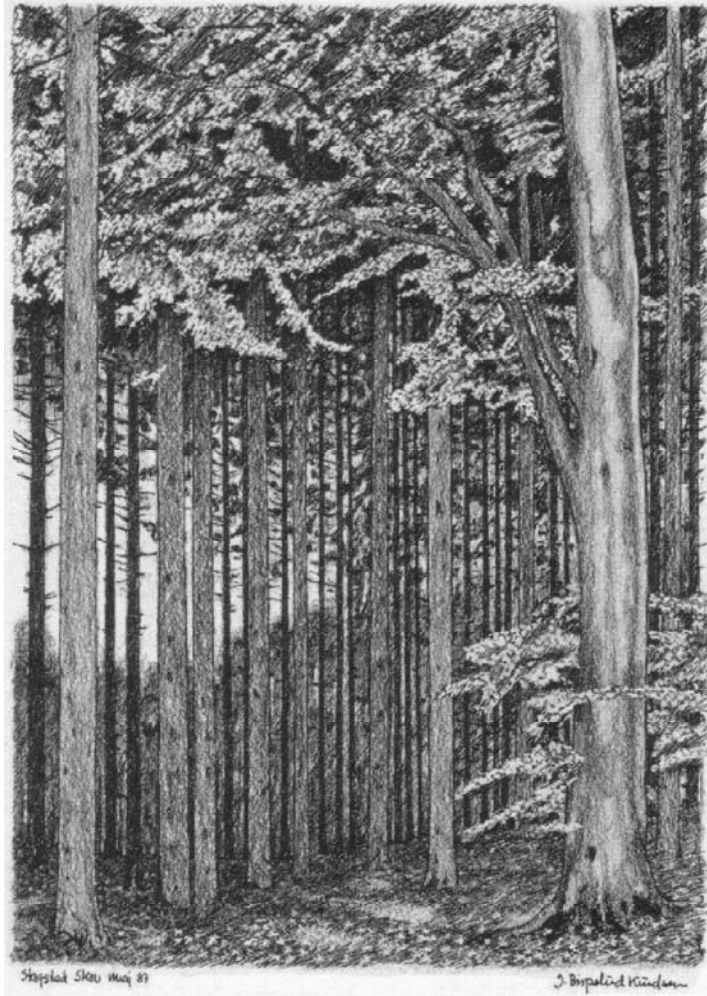
what i was saying was that the moment
did not only light up
the poem and itself
(like an electric bulb does not light
up itself and
a measure does
not measure itself) but that the
moment of the
poem lit up
that life and that time which were a
prerequisite for the very same poem

this in turn meant that time could
even so contain its own explanation
as long as it took place in the light of eternity
which in turn was the same as saying
that it was incomprehensible even though
it was comprehensible for that was what
the paradox sounded like in another key

i no longer needed to sit
and wait for
the sublime
moments (eternity) for that
would be just as
big a mistake
as only wanting to hold on
to life (time)
it was the whole
that made up 'world' and the basis
of what is called 'the living word'

when the poem (which apparently
did not occupy itself
nearly as much
with the momentary as
for example
journalism)
nevertheless survived the passing
of time this was because
the poem was related to
this wholeness and therefore photographed
time far more truly with the moment's flash

it all sounded
so clever but
it did not explain
anything about what had become of
my mother – was that
what i had been
asking about? – on the contrary – my
investigations
pertained to the problems of time
and time was the last place
i should be looking
for my
mother now



eight improvisation
on time
i ought to have
written a sonnet
for dexter gordon
in black and violet
framed with ivy
a sonnet that praised his
low notes which sound
as if he is blowing
over empty beer bottles and i'll
certainly do so one fine day

but right now i'm more
preoccupied with a small
oddity in his playing
i'm talking about the minimal
lag behind the beat
that is so character
istic for dexter gordon
the slight delay between
what he plays and
what he actually plays
the small rubato between
the seconds' nicotine stains

that slight imprecision
that has caused
certain people to
assume that
dexter gordon
couldn't keep
up and that he would
finally find himself
lacking a
number of
notes when the piece
had come to an end

that of course is not
the case – by means
of his technique dexter gordon
ends up rather playing more
than he actually
plays – he almost
manages to comment on his
own playing by means of
this tiny time-lag
to interpret not only
what he has played but
what he is playing right now

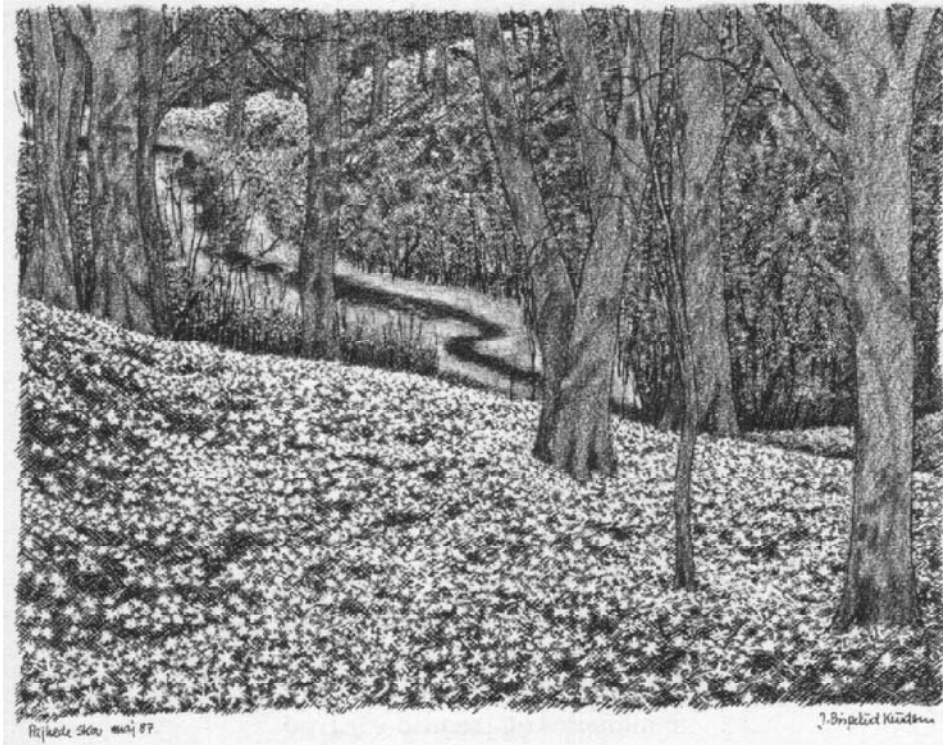
in reality it is the
very delay
between life and art that dexter
gordon is demonstrating and
who knows is maybe trying
to drown out with his
saxophone – in reality
dexter gordon is attempting
to hold life and art
together in one moment
do you get me? – dexter gordon
is extending the now in extremis

if this now is to stand in time
transformed into
a moment it has
to be touched by the magic wand
of the eternal by the
star-dust of the paradox
then it will be transparently and
credibly there in the poem
crystallised
as one instant in time itself without
time transformed from now to moment

i naturally
consoled myself
with proust now and then
intoxicated myself in the sweet muscatels
of memory so as to escape
for a moment from
this other moment that demanded
so much – moved
along the garden paths in ‘guermantes’
into my own memory where the snow
was just falling
as now early in april
over the rose bushes

i then concerned myself with time once more
by which i mean
that i went on living
(after all the bills had to be paid
the roses pruned and
the meetings pencilled in)
constantly reserving
for myself that the moment
would occur anew
almost like the old junghans clock that
struck now and then although not wound up

and the moment would
be the identical twin of that
now which it doubled
because it was that now
the only difference
would be the insight
the insight that it
wasn't anything else
it would really only
be a matter of a
a change of being
but not of nature



7/4 16.05 a danish flag flapped
above a cloudless sky – was th
ere something i should recall?
was it waldemar's day today i
t couldn't be valdemar's day in
early april it had to be someon
e else's memory that was to be
woken up this spring day

the eighth sky hung lopsided
at an angle of approx. 30 deg
rees – that irritated me just a
s much as recalling that forg
etting had to be more or less
governed by chance – deep do
wn i hoped that we were the
ones who arranged ‘forgetting’
just as i myself was able to ri
ght this picture

i imagined that the sky in exa
ctly three months’ time would
resemble the sky in the dankv
art dreyer reproduction i was
sitting with – why not? dreyer
knew the little belt coast extr
emely well i would be precisely
there three months from now a
nd the future was in spite of ev
erything just as linked to the p
ast as to my notions

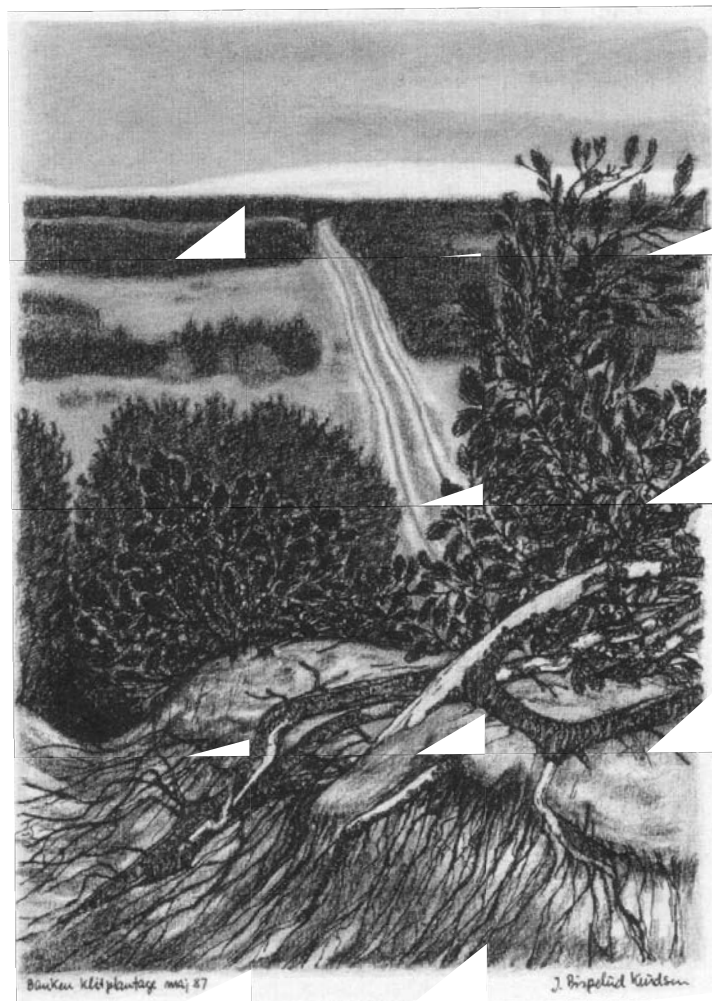
at the last moment i saved
a 'paradise tree' (cras
sula) up from a refuse
sack – my mother's last indoor
plant (which i had
discarded from pure
superstition) and placed it in
the garden at the foot of
an apple tree – now it
would have to take care of its own
fate out there in nature's own paradise

another day i
found in an unnoticed
drawer in one of the
pieces of furniture due to be sold later
a bundle of christmas cards from nineteen
hundred and sixty
it was almost like reading proust
studying these
forgotten greetings – apart from the
fact that these cards had really
been written
in nineteen
hundred and sixty

incidentally proust had already begun
to disappoint me
in part two of 'within
a budding grove' – the book had
developed into
a normal novel
rather than into an attempt to
explore the nature
of memory – what we recall
are not long complex dialogues but
a dead fly on a particular window-sill

that my mother's death
caused me so much pain
was because her
life was inextricably bound up
with my youth – then i felt
everything i then
couldn't write while later i
tended to write
everything i no longer could
feel except in the happy
moments when
both parts worked
at one and the same time

goodness gracious me how quickly
it all went – my mother
had already become
a strange little woman in
a fairytale as beautiful
as the thorvald
niss painting ‘a winter day in the wood’
but just as distant
how rapidly the past
reduced itself to memories i could
retell in poems – it took four months



i tried to hold back
sat down for example
with a particular
piece of embroidery my mother had
sewn so as to transfer as by an act
of telekinesis
something from the past
'how was it then that
things had been' i asked
but it was in vain – the magnifying
glass of the now
gathered all of life
into one point

or i tried consciously to delay my
writing rationed the poems to one
per day in the vain hope that time then
would also pass more slowly so that
i could manage to press the past in between
the words – but it was irrevocable
all that was left was memories' fermented preserve

it seemed to me to
be a reasonably good comparison:
the preserving jars
of memory marshalled
and lined up down
in the cellar blackcurrant
and blackberry preserved with
sodium benzoate and far too much
sugar one day dried out to form
a black indigestible pitch
when the negrita
rum had evaporated

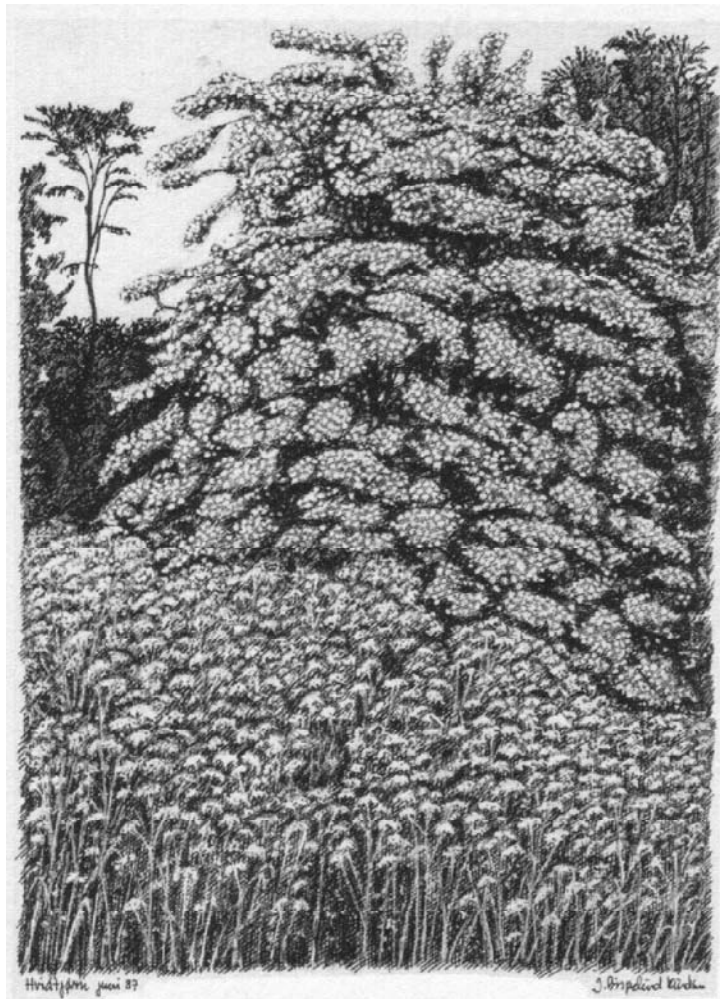
i believe that those
characteristics and
peculiarities one has
inherited from one's mother
intensify to a certain extent
when she is dead
as a sort of compensation for
the woeful
insight one is suddenly left
with when it is too late:
that one has never
ever
really known her

at any rate i observed a
greater urge to
isolate myself 'to shut
myself in' as my mother
would have put it
which in turn
caused a claustrophobic feeling
of angst when faced with
the remaining dusty mahogany
furniture – and the migraine mentioned earlier
i ascribed to my mother's influence

furthermore i had started to feel
ill at ease in this
house which i knew
so well which was probably due
to the pattern of what
had been settling
like a piece of transparent graph
paper over the present
so that only the congruence
of the rooms was right but not that of
the coordinates (number of furniture items, etc)

so i knew quite well really that
it was high time
to leave my
childhood house which now
only stood there like
an empty shell
around the content i myself
contained – the house
which now practically
only existed in the blueprint of the archi
tectural drawings of an imagined future

the paradise apple tree was blossoming
out by the garden gate
to the east my mother's
soul rushed through me like a
breath that came
from another world
that at any rate is how i
construed it even
though it was
perhaps more my own intoxication
at this life that i was moved by



ninth improvisation on
time – there was a
saxophone in front of me on a
sky-blue piece of velvet
it was an alto sax
of the make buffet
i would probably have pre
ferred a yamaha plastic saxo
phone but this one
happened to be brass
the alloy of which the soul
has probably also been made

i picked up the saxo
phone with a certain
reverence – this was then
the sort of instrument
on which the
impossible could be
performed - this was then
the sort of of instrument
on which albert
ayler transformed
his life into art
and his art into life

all right then – that was
what it looked like were
you allowed to play on it?
there couldn't be any harm
in trying
i inserted the
mouthpiece between my
lips and moistened
the bamboo reed
then i blew
my first and last
saxophone solo ever

i ought not to have
 committed blasphemy
i could clearly hear from the tape
afterwards – it was almost
 tragic the way that solo
 sounded like albert ayler
i ought to write my own
poems instead and never
 again try my hand at
 the black magic of
playing out my spirit on a sax
or playing in the spirits

i put back the saxophone
 on the
sky-blue velvet
thanks for the loan for
 a brief moment
 thanks for the
mistakes – thanks for
the ten miracles that
 were played on it
 i put the
saxophone back in the silence
the silence after albert ayler

i went and sat up in the south room
and looked out at
the holy crown of the
acacia tree – i could remember most
things here from the rooms
of my boyhood years
but i remembered nothing – the feeling
had been disconnected there
were only the images left
of my stepfather for example when he once
planted this freemason tree in his heart

therefore my planned
farewell with each
individual room
would never come to anything
why should i make a
laterna magica
revolve the libido of which was
long since spent
why should i let slides
flicker on these wallpapers
that soon
were to be
painted over?

perhaps it was
also symbolic that
the cable of the
television aerial had been cut
and now grazed against the
windows on the verandah
but i am probably over
interpreting – those
kinds of images had hardly had
anything to do with the memory
at all
they just
disappeared



maybe proust was right when he
claimed that
the memory was
focused on the moment more than
on time passing
so the recollection
would stand like an image a poem
a work of art that
had just never been
carried out and was now bleached by
the chlorine and sour rain of finiteness

in that case proust's own work could be charac
terised as a kind of restoration project
carried out in the light of eternity that precisely
and paradoxically enough dazzled the artist
because the moment now was another one namely
the present one his own existence – the
moment could not be reconstructed post factum

the ninth sky had hung on
the wall above the place w
here my writing desk now
stood under the embroider
ed rose – i looked in the so
licitor's auction catalogue
to see what such a picture
was worth – unknown art
ist: seascape with sailing
ship 1200 kroner it said

20/4 10.35 the sky was he
avy with rain and had a
colour like the beethoven
sonatas i still did not allo
w myself to play or like t
he name of the fortified w
ine i had just poured a gl
ass of (more than its subs
tance) namely: rainwater

i had begun to drink madeira partly because
my mother had mostly left behind that
drink and partly to try out my father's vice
in private to see whether it was in my genes
so to speak – either way it was a lethal
combination: madeira in the morning
so i quickly put an end to the experiment

more than four months had now passed and i had
heard nothing from my mother no knocking sounds
no short circuits and the thought again struck me
that this was because she had become nothing
a thought which (like the light of the moon is only kept
in check by the sun's stronger light) was only outshone by
the greater thought that nothing cannot be its own cause either

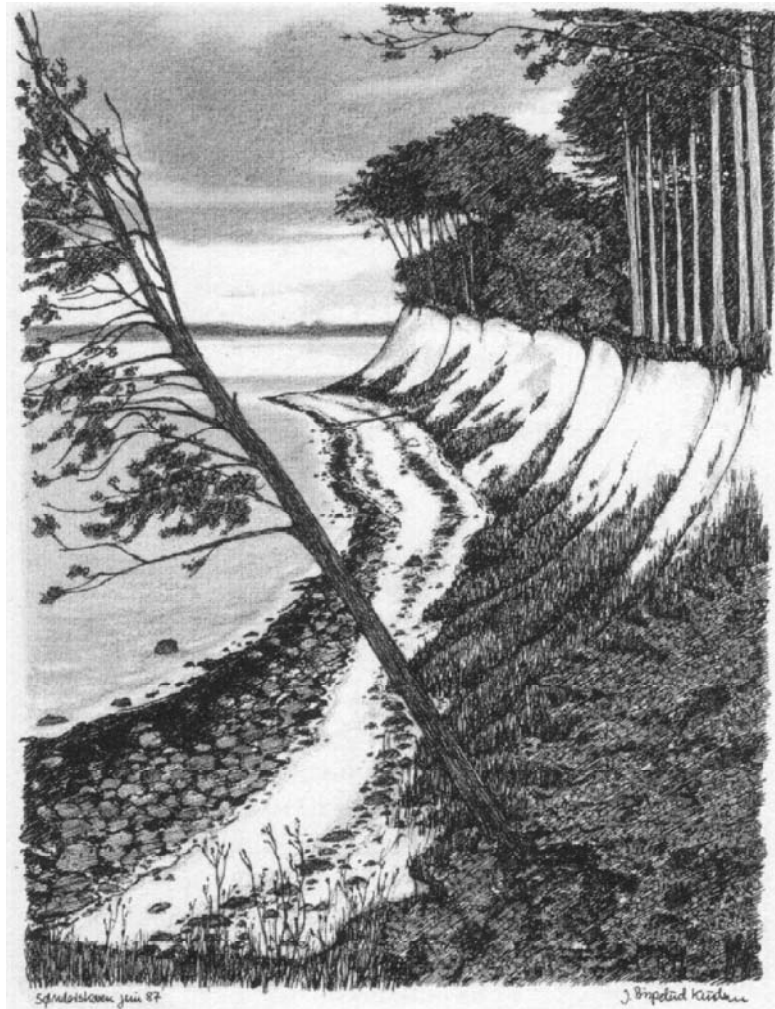
to move around the top floor was like
being in a painting
by hammershøi one
of those from strandgade with open
doors on all sides
and windows in bays
it was the same metaphysics that
ruled here that
i knew so well
since i had grown up in it but
was still unable to define

behind the loss
(if the truth be known)
there was also
a certain triumph in ruthlessly
selling off the empire chairs – now
i was the one who
decided now i was the one who demon
strated my in
difference concerning this lifestyle
and maintained my lack of respect
now i was
the one who
had become adult

on the one hand i had attempted
to demythologise
childhood but on the
other hand probably mythologised
my mother's death
which meant i was back
at square one – the scales had
simply sunk
down into the
cellars' underground darkness
without weighing the mystery

i had stretched the moment between my mother's
death and may's beech now coming into leaf
in distant unwritten poems while time naturally
took its usual course from second to
second – but a moment could last that long
because it was grounded more in trustworthi
ness than in any real authenticity

i opened the
last cupboard
to see if there was
anything i had forgotten
something i musn't forget
but not even
the smell of pepper and sherry (the
smell that more than
anything is connected with memory)
caused me to remember anything
no there was
nothing more for
me to remember



my migraine decreased at the same rate as my
reading of proust became more dis
connected – i skimmed large expanses
of text without catching a deeper meaning
almost as when at sea one can see the
patterns of the foam but have no idea of
what is happening on the floor's dark continents

if on the other hand i
concentrated i invariably got
caught in some
parenthesis or other
(like a lobster in the pot)
the words of which i
read over and over again until i
understood them but then
the sentence had become
detached from the
larger context
of which it was part

i also noticed a
disconnected tendency in my
own inspiration it was
as if i had to go further out
each time to bring
the words into the poem
(like a salmon fisher
 who has to pay out
 more and more line
thereby making more difficult
the landing
of his fish

so it might look as if the lack of
coherence between word and sentences
between the parts and the whole
was due to the simple fact
that 'the skies' had reached
its swan song that the moment
of 'the skies' was just about over

i tried one last time to
gather the pieces
together into the whole
that was to become 'the skies' as
the sole valid
memory which
would still be remaining because
it had been created
by the moment
i had recourse one last time to
the unifying and healing nature of jazz

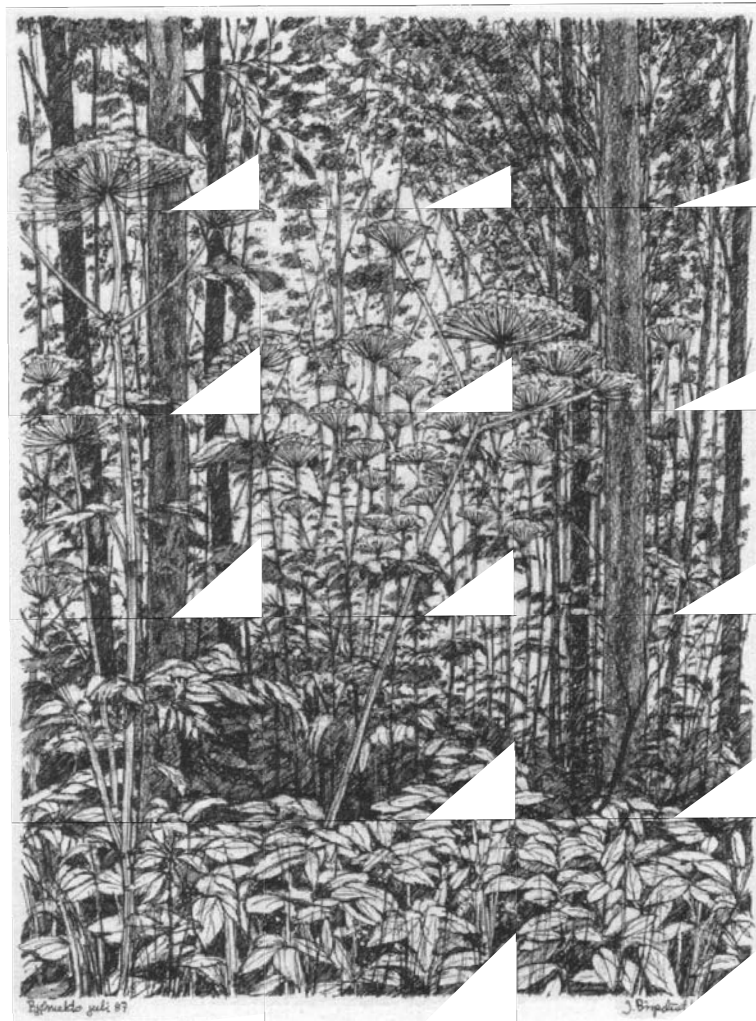
for per højholt

tenth improvisation on
time – firstly
bamboo can of course
well be light blue in colour
secondly you
can see it in your
own garden or on wayne
shorter's record 'juju' and
it is no
coincidence that
the record's name is 'juju' and
not just juju or "juju"

wayne shorter is perfectly
well aware that it is
not juju he is making you an
accessory to but only
 'juju' just as
 every poet
realises that there isn't
any bamboo in his poem
 no matter how
 true to life he
depicts it for the trompe
l'œil of your inner eye

nor is it wayne shorter's
 music i am
making you an accessory
to by mentioning
 'juju' in this
 poem – wayne
shorter does not confuse
his life with art
 wayne shorter
 knows very well the
difference between wayne
shorter and 'wayne shorter'

even though he did not
design the record cover
himself with the light blue
bamboo and quotation marks
round 'juju' – it is
nevertheless the distance
between juju and 'juju' he is
trying to transcend each time
he blows on his saxophone
wayne shorter knows very
well that the secret is hidden in the
light blue bamboo between juju and 'juju'



i could really see that my mother
went on living in me
not only her
more gentle characteristics stood
out in my nature
but the harsher ones too
to my own surprise i discovered
that i was hard as nails
in business matters
or maybe it was even so the jewish blood
that had begun to course through my veins?

at any rate i set the estate agents
up against each other
as well as the antique
dealers in a game that both
amused me and brought
the prices to rock-bottom
or sky-high in my own favour
was it saturn in the
right position or was it
in reality the reverse of romanticism that
showed itself in the mirrors as cool calculation?

i felt no shame at this course of
action on the contrary
i was proud
at having administered my mother's
inheritance (the
outer and the inner)
in the spirit she herself would have
accepted now
as she
rose up in me like a
pillar of fire like a true cherub

the tenth sky was empty with
out clouds without stars with
out a moon as empty as if i ha
d said to myself: 'you must not
forget anything' and i then co
uld not recall what i had not t
o forget – so empty was the te
nth sky – had there even been
a tenth sky at all?

30/4 11.55 the sky was clear and blue as if it was reflected in the lawn's forgetmenots waspurgisnacht es träumen die wolken die sterne der mond – 'warum weinest du kindlein in dieser stund' i changed the poem to without wholly knowing why

i imagined that the skies in may would become large and happy like a headache that had eased – i imagined that the sun would gleam like the rarest rub medal down through the heavy nimbus clouds of oblivion to the west

the following day
i got hopelessly
stuck in my reading
of proust – quite a way into
'the guermantes way' i came
definitively to a halt
in the sentence: 'and maybe the
resurrection of the
soul after death is to be conceived
as a phenomenon of the memory' –
there was nothing more
for me to look for
in that direction

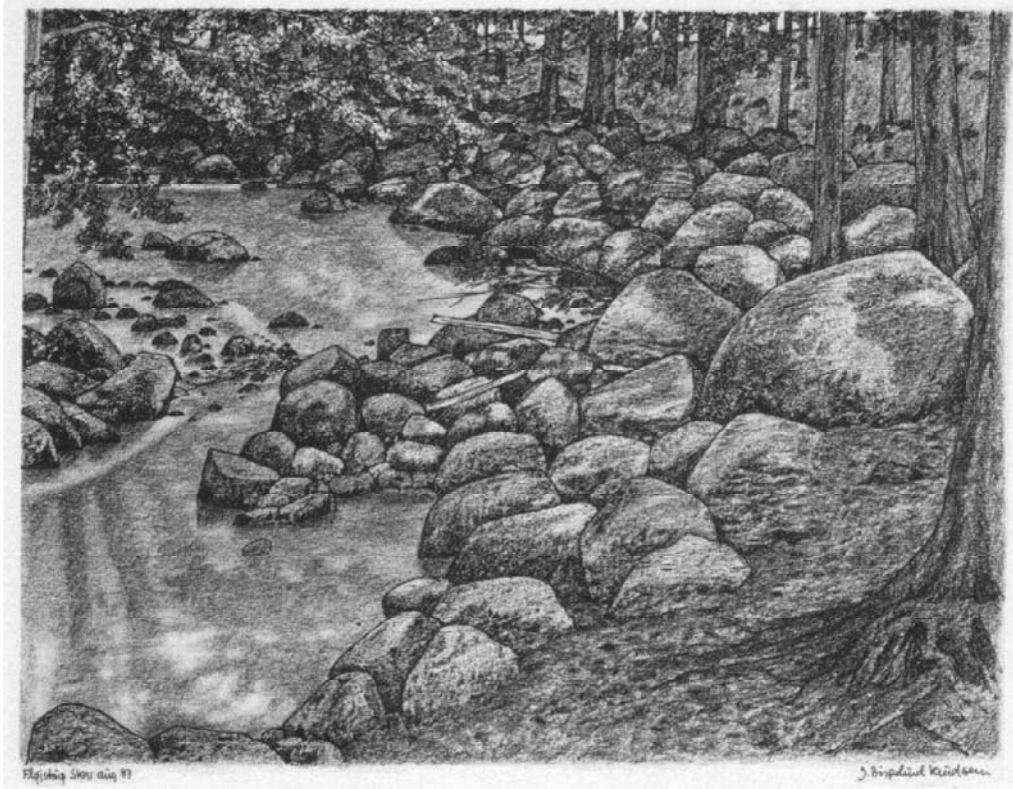
i was finished with the past – or
rather i had assimilated the past into
me partly as memory partly as
the few moments and
partly as a biological
act – i had become my own past
not as a result
of it (rather the
contrary) but i had integrated its
woods skies and shores into me

the retrograde movement was over
i no longer needed to be afraid that
beethoven's sonatas would keep me in the past
and therefore i now allowed myself to
succumb to the latent desire to listen to
the 'appassionata' three times in a row
my god it was almost like an orgasm

when the final
deal with the most
valuable furniture
(of mahogany with brass eagles) had
been concluded i was of course the one
who had been
cheated and i felt quite
happy with that
result – i was still
myself – i would god be praised
never become
a good
businessman

all that was now left was to sell
 this house with
 its verandahs
spiral staircases and gables higher
 than memory
 pointed with gothic
like spring's evenings of tin
 i let the 'diabelli
 variations'
compete with the blackbird
out there to slake my sadness

i knew that in the long run
 nothing would
 remain of
this house and all its dreams
 except for these
 poems – 'it would
only be borne by words and sonnets
 in the blue cobwebs
 of poetry'
to quote myself from a stanza
that no longer existed any more



and the skies had been witness to
these events which took place
god knows where – in the memory in
reality or perhaps only in the
unfailing moments of poetry? – the skies
that now seem to me like miniatures
painted on ivory had been the only witnesses

and the stars were the even more silent
observers of this drama which
took place between mother and son after
death in an arena that was not
much bigger than a consciousness
the stars which did not know that
every passion wants to go to ground

and the clouds had been the painted set
pieces the scenery in a play
that was not of this world and
that did not observe the unity
of time place and action
the clouds were the white robes
in which my mother's soul had been swathed

and the sun and the moon had cast their
quartz iodine light onto this stage which
did not exist anywhere in the empty house
where all the clocks had stopped – this
stage which was larger than reality
but smaller than dreams lighter
than life but darker than death

and i went down
the last steps of
memory where
so many years ago a copper
had stood full of pythian
vapours and i saw
that all the fairytales were gone
because they had
become reality – now it was a
question of turning reality into
fairytales again
into the only
true fairytale

and the wood pigeons
cooed out there in
the garden as they
always had done (even in my deepest
dreams): 'go-o-odness gracious go-o-od
ness gracious' all day
long – and they were closer to
the truth than i
but did not know it – and that
was precisely the difference
between real
ity and the
great reality

and i shut the last door
of the house that did
not exist here
tomorrow it would be another
house that i
no longer knew
i clicked the ruko lock shut and
took fifty years'
luggage with me
inside – pictures and other nicknacks
that couldn't be in a poem

and i left the house behind in the poem
the house where 'i'
after 'i' had
left their unmistakable traces
and last of all i left
the poem behind
by the backdoor so to speak
in the process of
writing a completely
different poem – only 'i' was left
behind alone in my own past

the skies were extinguished one by one
deep within the mirrors of memory
precisely as in reality out there
to the west at the world's end

where the sun stood like a mad
prophet among the ruins of the clouds
and god was the only true witness of what
had taken place in the house of forgetting

THE SHORES
(life)

the shores lay shimmering-white
along july's gypsum like
long unreadable poems
between fairytale and reality

irreparable poems that could
could be healed now and then when
the sea inundated them with
its golden and sacred salts

we were standing on
an unknown shore
that bordered on
memory as if
we nevertheless could
remember the lapping of the waves
as more than an answer
we were standing on
an unknown shore
where the sun had
left behind a castle
by b s ingemann

we had almost
lost our childhood faith
and the sea was a
fine emblem of
this state
now that it had
receded
at ebb tide and
strewn the foreshore
with so many
different pebbles
to stumble over

july was burning low
like a paraffin lamp
under the water
a medusa of glass
that stood there precisely with
its dome
from the biedermeier period
down there on the floor
of the season
the fairytales were burning
on a low flame in
danish domestic waters

the words seemed
cold and heavy to us
like the black stones
of basalt the boulder-fishers
were struggling with out
in the kattegat – words
such as 'grief'
'loss' and 'longing'
seemed to us to
belong more to a
book on mineralogy
than to a poem



midnight's seaweed
had a faint fragrance
like incense from a
clandestine service
we would never
attend because
belief for us was an
open question that
could not be answered
once and for all
with words such as
'god' or 'amen'

had god perhaps
forgotten us or was
it more the opposite
here on this dry
shore where we
had to fight for
each grain of sand again
(even the one satan
had failed to find) to
reconquer every word even
the one god had not
hidden from us

'midsummer' for
example was difficult
to get into position
even though the elder
was blossoming more wildly
than ever before and
smelled as sweet as
my mother's heart
even though reality
struck with
midsummer just
outside the poem

look – i said to
you among the shore's
mica stones – here
the fragments of hans
christian andersen's fairytales
lie scattered – let's
gather them into another
strange fairytale
in which all that is beautiful
and good gets a word in
and its due
in the mirror



when we had walked nine poems we reached
this line 'you bracing danish shore'
(and since the sky had been painted by
jens juel the shore could not be
more summerlike) – that was a good start
but we could not remember what
came next so we had to invent it ourselves

but that was more or less life's own terms and
they were something we had to discover
for ourselves (their meaning at any rate)
every single moment – for example we
had to decide if we would let that tortoiseshell
out of the attic where it would otherwise
die on the wallpaper of artificial roses

incidentally it was not all that
 remarkable that we had adopted
this of all courses of action since we were
 on precisely the road from brenderup
out to the coast that the poet himself had
 taken when he gained inspiration
for it sometime in the previous century

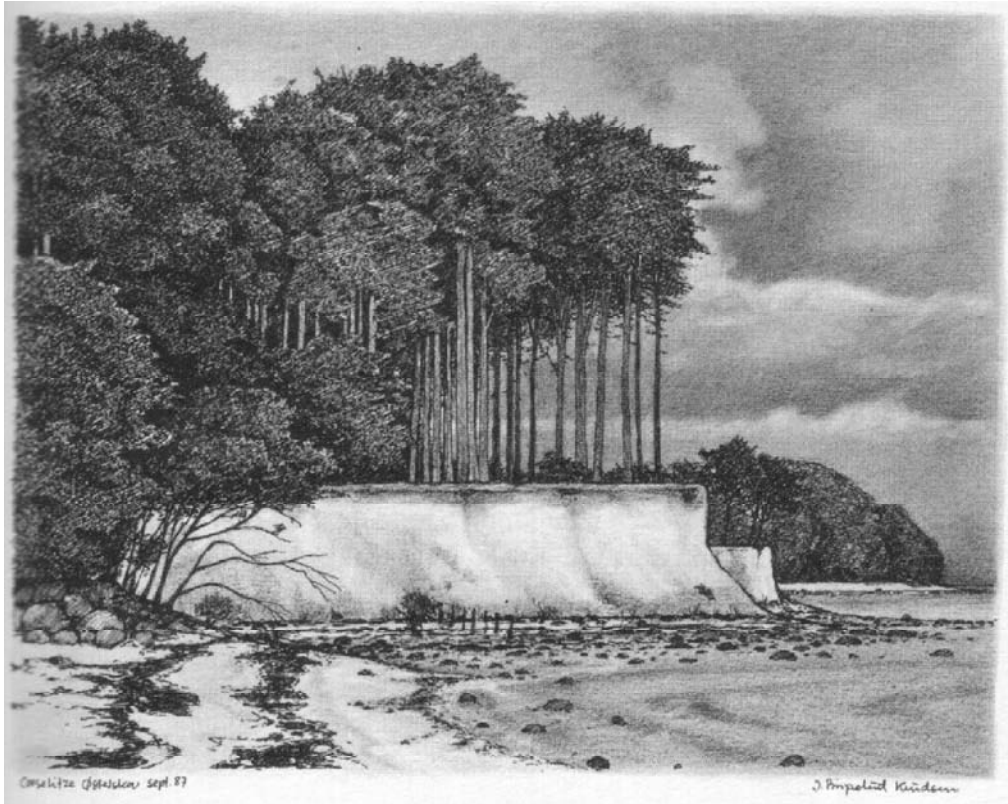
what came next ended up like this:
 'the broken glass the light cuts'
(the green piece from the bottle where the genie
 had been imprisoned for a hundred years)
this is what ended up coming next in
 this thirteenth poem – or did it actually
end up: 'what came next ended up like this'?

had the music been composed by carl nielsen?
it didn't sound like it yet we nevertheless
found ourselves between two movements in
his string quintet here at fogense
point where the rugosa was flowering more
beautifully than in the fairytales and wildly
than at any northern shore of our past

now it was a question of not making the
first mistake which would consist in
comparing these dog roses on this
shore by the little belt with all other
possible roses from memory's coasts and
gardens – for example with those that
had grown in my mother's rose pergola

now it was a question of holding on to these
coordinates where the lightning crossed the
swallows' flight through the camel's eye of time – now
it was a question of not writing ' the roses on
the northern shore were whiter' – (so consider the
previous sentence as deleted) now it was a
question of letting these roses gleam in their own salt

now it was a question of letting memory dry
in its own siccatives like paintings
and nothing else – now it was a question of letting
the poems collect dust in distant desk
drawers at any rate as long as the summer rain
was falling over the salt meadows – the poet
wrote who was just writing this line in 'the shores'



on the other hand the second mistake could
become worse or greater than the first:
namely to believe it was possible to go round
in the summer rain just like that
that is to say without losing one's foothold
namely to imagine that nature
or biology could experience itself

it was after all a question of putting the
pieces together – of joining language
and reality into the whole and the unity which
the experience was – so we well knew
that the summer rain was only one
necessary cause among
many others in our enterprise

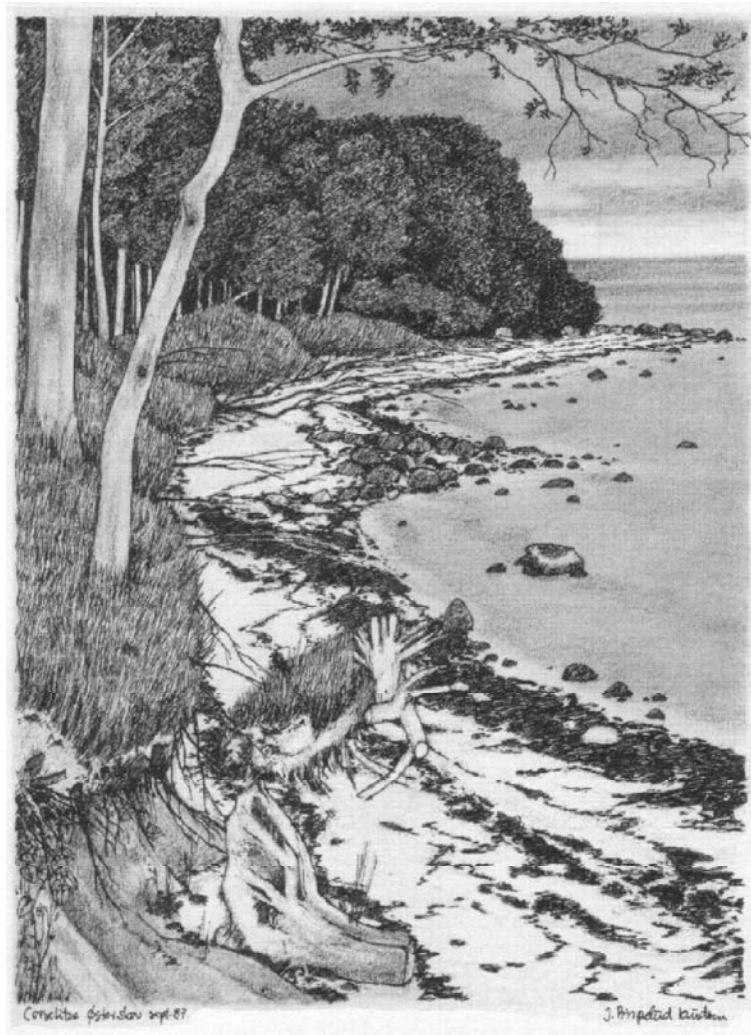
another of the necessary causes was
of course 'the summer rain' but
the third mistake was also something we
were familiar with – we were perfectly
well aware that reality was not to be found in
the mazes of language – we no longer got
lost between the lacunae of the quotation marks

on the one hand life was easy – it was
 simply not being dead – on the other
hand it was difficult infinitely more difficult
 than death – it cost more than words
to hit existence on the head it
 called for more than chamber music
to hit life's keynote

we had become frugal – if the day's harvest
 consisted only of a 'sea rocket'
that had been transformed into a sea rocket
 we were more than content because we
had discovered the secret that life's meaning
 was created by the smallest and often least
noticed events and occurrences

or rather: it was these minimal
actions and decisions in everyday life
that formed the base of the pyramid that made
up life's meaning – the pyramid whose summit
was touched by god's finger like the distant
summer lightning out behind wedelsborg
that brushed july's tallest tower

it was therefore so important to put together the pieces
of this fundament (of wheat and rape fields
for example) the pieces of this jigsaw puzzle with care
because the transfiguration more than the
explanation would otherwise not occur and everyday
doings would fall apart and be scattered to the
four winds – this care was life's actual grind



day after day time and time again
 (three times at any rate) over and
over again to start each day from scratch to
 put these minute pieces together without
losing patience and devotion to spell one's
 way each day to the same words
that constituted life's actual grind

but also its strength – it was so easy
anyone could do it anyone
could maintain his love in the smallest
of actions – there was no excuse for
tearing the wings off a cabbage white – there
was no forgiveness for overlooking the
wild camomile – it was so simple – so difficult

‘it was so simple’ i wrote and that i
maintained – everyone could maintain his
love everyone could refrain from snapping at
his beloved at the breakfast
table – everyone could refrain from treading a
spider into the dust i emphasised this
because it was the beginning of life’s meaning

'it was so difficult' i wrote and that i maintained
because the pieces of this puzzle could only
be put together in the light of the whole of which they
were a part and this whole did not emerge
clearly until the whole had been put together
it was bloody difficult to realise that
life's meaning was nothing else than the everyday

it was so bloody difficult to have to accept
that the jigsaw puzzle each time it had been
put together simply showed the same picture
like the cover picture on the box in which
the pieces lay higgledy piggledy – it was so
difficult to accept that life was not
something completely different and other

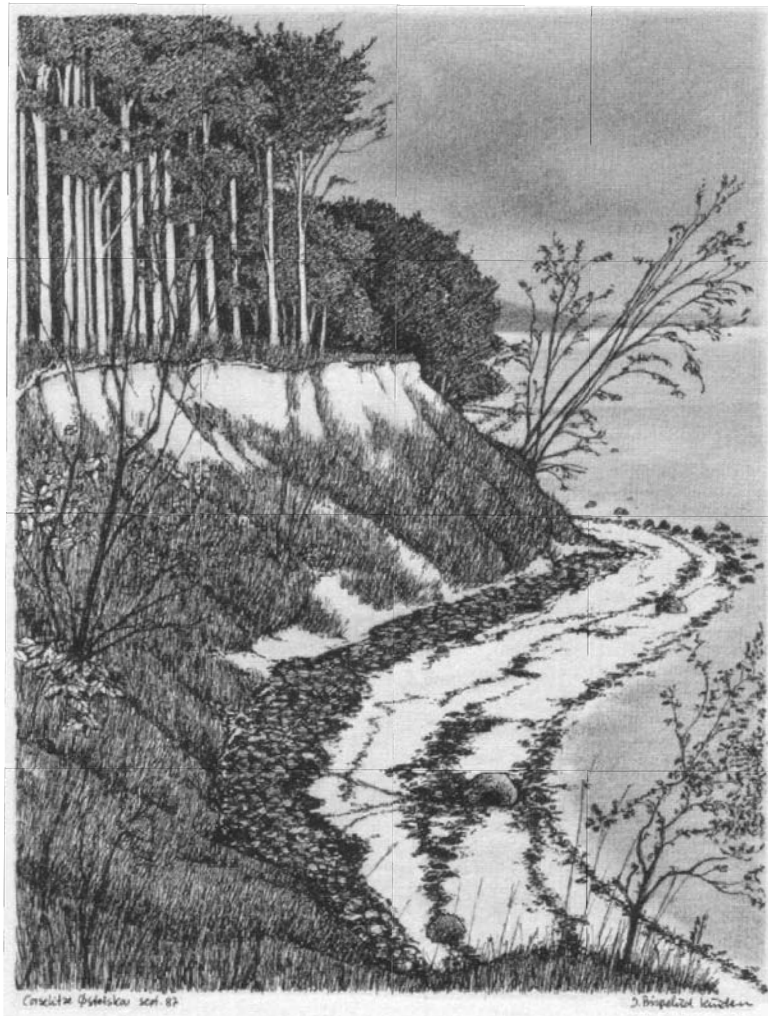
my mother's death faded like the summer
clouds that disappeared out behind the
fifth symphony there where blue wears blue
out behind the sea where memory is slowly
transformed into memories – pieces of the mind
that could no longer be separated
from the other danish islands on the horizon

the first memory was 'blue as the loveliest
cornflower' in the middle of which my mother
would put me to bed out behind the kitchen where
an unhappy woman had done away with
herself – but no ghost could yet threaten
our lord's prayer because death
still only moved in fairytales

'where the danish flag flutters' i suddenly
recall – isn't that right i asked you
my beloved here where bearing strand
made a curve of brass – have a look
in the high school song book you replied but
i did not want to help my memory along yet
nor did i know in which packing case i should look

another day we also reconquered the eel-
grass that for so long had formed green
lemniscates on the bottom of our dreams
we repeated this word in the most literal
sense reintroduced it in a certain way into
life's dictionary even though we couldn't
simply for that reason look it up under e

new words did not help us very much – often
they only delayed our enterprise even though
they were beautiful and expanded the universe
'cinquefoil' for example sounded almost
like a sonata when it was linked to the small
yellow flowers behind the language that gave
it meaning – but they were no necessary condition



naturally we were not literally and continuously
down on the shores but we related
to them continuously during those late july days
when the dog star barked we related to
them with our senses emotions and minds
no matter whether they stretched alongside
reality or were in carl nielsen's string quartet

and we related to the shores in our
dreams where my mother still dived
for the golden ear ring she had lost
doing a header once – and we related to
the shore that linked the two fairytales
with each other and to the poem's shore
that almost ran along the edge of the paper

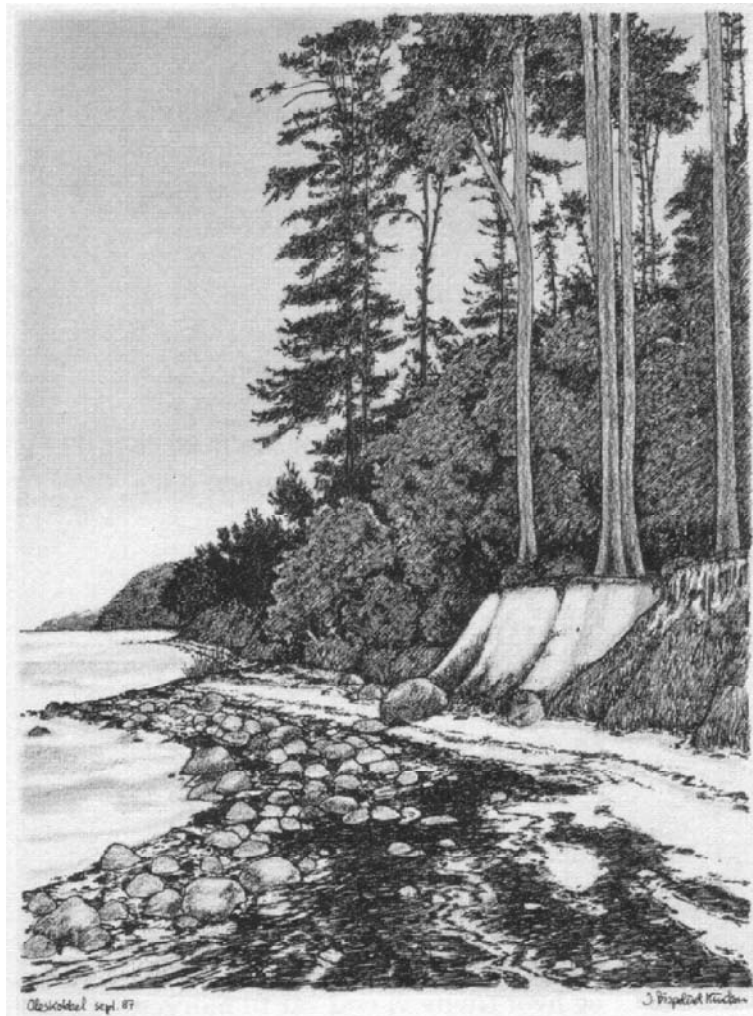
it was these pieces of evil's
mirror spread to all words and books
spread to all reality's winds and
sufferings that we tried to put together
into a mirror again that could dazzle
the powers of darkness – we tried to raise
the sum of the mistakes to one single truth

and we knew that even though this
enterprise were to be
successful only the
necessary condition would have been
fulfilled – we knew that
even though we had done
our work it would not be sufficient
we could polish
the mirror and chase
it but only god could fill it with
anything else than emptiness

the dog days began bathed in red
gold from the sun
that hung out behind
æbelø in a black halo of thunder
flies – in the fields
the wheat worked
quietly and steadily away at life
ear by ear and
the birds – the
farmers harvested in other fields
we too had to pull ourselves together now

and we had to move on with our
daily routines
lift them just
a little bit above the threshold
of habit – we too
had to resume
the ritual of service in padesø
church this ninth
sunday after trinity
no matter how early it began
and how tired we were that morning

we too had to gather other pieces
than branches and twigs
that were enough
for the birds we too had to gather
the words together
again to form another
song of praise or the same one we too
had to sing along
with grundtvig's
hymn once more no matter how
tired we might be of god



we too had to go down to the shore
again to find
yet another piece
for “the shores” yet another
fragment of
death’s shattered
mirror – we too had to go down to
lindø point
to find
this line of the poem completely
covered by hungry ladybirds

(and while you were reading this the
tree turned its leaves
towards the afterglow
the sea leafed through its waves
and while you were
reading this the wind
wrote in the sand about great
shipwrecks and
even greater rescues
and while you were reading this death was
waiting somewhere behind the corn)

what we meant was not mainly
to do our
daily round
but the hard and tiring work
involved in living
and not merely
breathing (any fool could
after all do that)
that hard job
of avoiding a sense of futility when
god had withdrawn from the soul

now it was not enough to sit down
beside you and
look at the shores'
brass my love because the observa
tion only made up
one corner of necess
ity – we too had to understand and
therefore i used language
“the shores” i
said – but understanding was not
enough my love – in the totality

and therefore i clutched at the fairytale
so that you
could sense
the depth of my feelings when i
took you in
to the place
where my mother died – but the
perfect realm of dreams
was not enough
and so i had to write the poem
down to claim god's attention

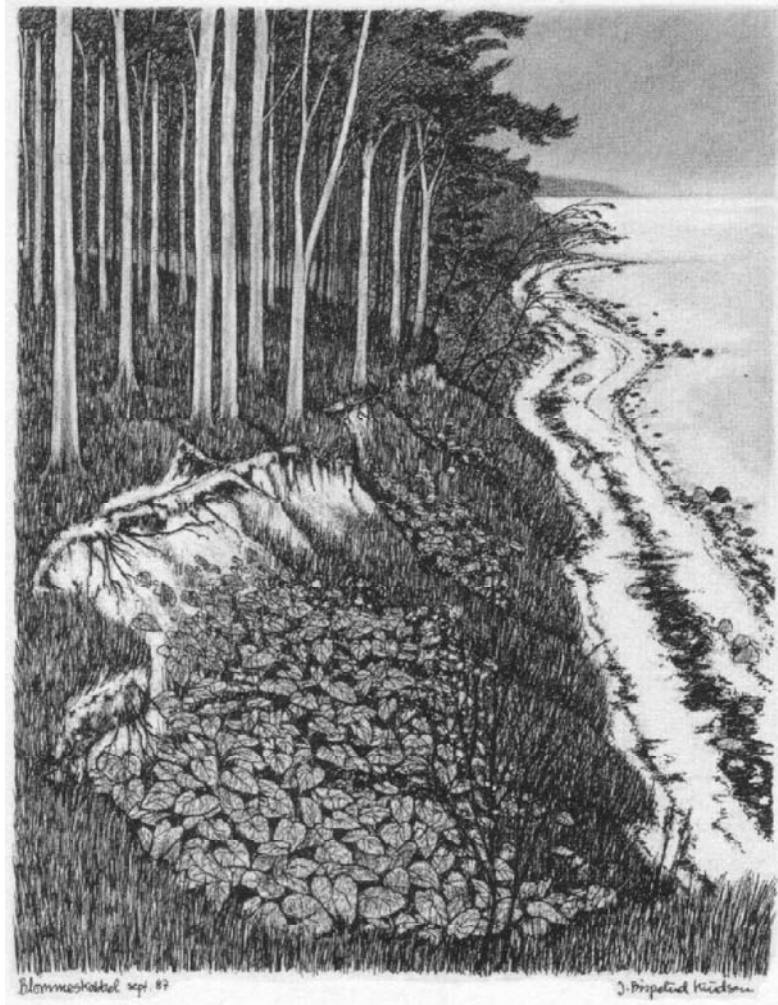
and i spread the salt from my mother's
house out in the
corners of this
square which once put together
made up the domain
of the simplest
manifestations of life – the foundation
on which the mean
ing of life stood
whether you found luck's rusty
horseshoe there in the clover or not

and the poem was not enough with its
scattered words that
were no match for
the song of the lark and the memories
were not enough
and reality
was not enough in this strange
game called
'the meaning of life'
and death was not enough – but almost
enough out here in the field fires

and we entered the second string
quartet between the
first and second
movements which lay like a field
of wheat and one
of barley on either
side of the road which led down to
the shore and out
over the sea july
went out like the fire in the crematorium
where my mother had been cremated

the day before the barley was to be
harvested i said
this to it: “a poet
once asked me what i would answer
if asked
to sum up
all of my poetry in one
single word”
i could not
answer just like that but now today
i answer “corn” – i answer

and i walked round the field of barley
anticlockwise so as
to define the field
of barley’s kingdom and the sun took
its due and the
botflies and the
brambles to the south – i
did this because
the field of barley
or rather the walking round it
made up another piece of the foundation



and our longing for the sea was
nothing else
than the longing
for the totality that must not be
be confused (the
fourth mistake)
with death even though farthest
out at the last sand bar
where the fire-glow
gleamed like chives in blossom
they maybe were the same

the second memory was not cinnabar
red even though
my mother
was smiling at a russian officer
who smiled
back with
a mouth full of stainless steel and
medals in
cellophane on
his chest the second memory had
already become its own small fairytale

for a long time we had gazed at the hill
ridge to the north
where the wheat cut
the horizon and the sun never stood
and this evening
we went up there
and looked down at the shore and the sea
and i knew that
i was defeated
not so much by old age as
by your love my beloved

for what was i to do with
a love that
looked at me
with eyes as blue as the sun
and said “look
i love you
unconditionally” – such a
love one
crucifies or
one surrenders unconditionally
no third possibility exists

and i capitulated without more ado
the reason also
being that my own
lesser and clandestine love
had been
exposed
by a far greater love
so there was
no reason to
conceal it any longer – i
was indeed over the hill

and on the other side of the hill
the poppies
waved to us
farther down towards the sea and
we followed
these inner
lines of sight: "where does summer
spread a flower bed
richer than here
down by the open shore" so that
the poem was right yet again



the memories shrank in the
early august sun
into miniatures
painted on ivory but i was
unable to
finish with my
mother – the memories were
clearly something
else than the dead
who washed in over the soul
imageless and salty as the sea

the third memory was beautiful
and green though
for some reason or
other to my inner eye: i bathed
my mother three
months before
she died as she once bathed me
and her own
father three months
before he died – who was now to
uphold this beautiful ceremony?

and just like the ginnings (as the
small wasps are
called over here)
found the smallest crevices
in the house and
forgot wide-open
windows they also found
with ease the
cracks in the
poem whose vocabulary they then
altered as you yourself can register

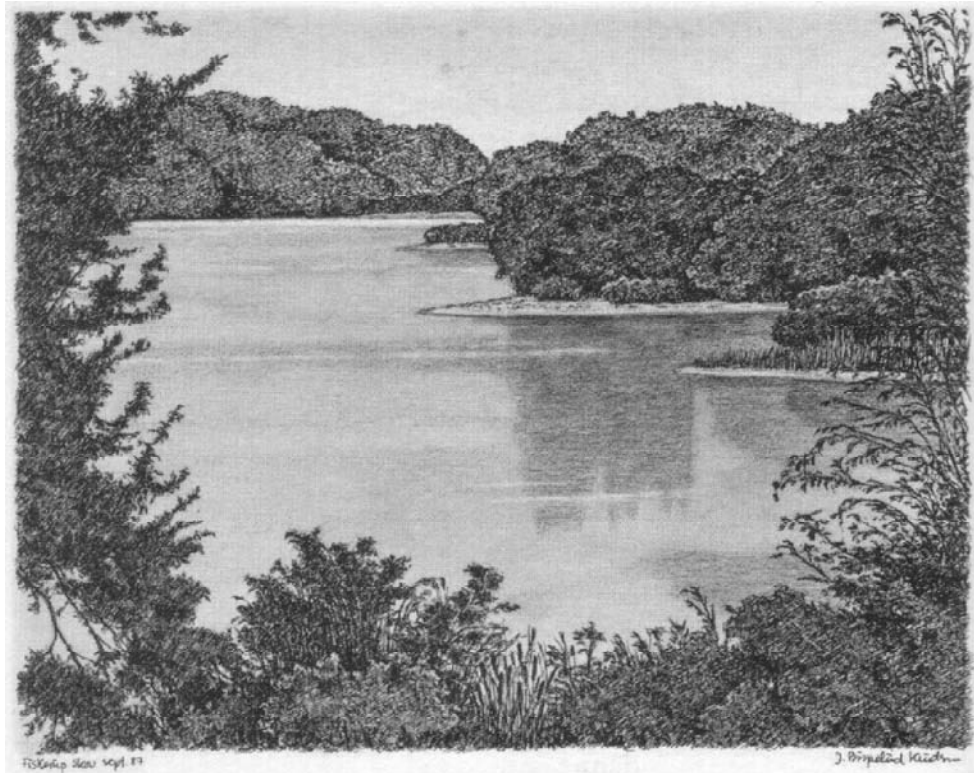
“some day you will miss me”
my mother
had said
and it was true she was right
about that – but
what she hadn’t
realised was that i had
always missed her
even while she was alive and we
almost saw each other every week

what she hadn't realised was
that the greatest
longing was the longing
for what we already possessed
that all longings
really
sprang from this one longing
which was
only slaked
in the moment of acquisition when
longing and longing became one

and that was life's hardest task:
that what you have
and are had to be
reconquered over and over each day
and life's greatest
paradox: that
what you were to conquer could only
be given to you
in the great moment
of acquisition when you had
precisely lost it again

and all other longings were only
lengthenings of
this one
longing – journeys out of the mind
towards the distant goals
on the horizon of
the fairytale where the clouds' castles
hung so red
with gold in the
evening sun – so you could return home
again to what you were and are

and that was life's greatest fairytale
to journey
to the world's end
to gain the simple insight
that what you
searched for you
had already found that who you
wanted to be
you already were
that all the time you were yourself
who else should you otherwise have been?



but – hey presto – as at the wave of a
wand just as
you had
grasped that you had lost
it again because
you were unable to
contain your own explanation and
hey presto – as at
the wave of a wand
you had grasped it again and
lost it again and grasped it again

and that was life's true fairytale
the only one that
was given to
slake this one longing again
and again
every day
to become who you were and are:
yourself
to wait
every day for mercy's great moment
where longing and longing became one

and that was life's true fairytale
the only one that
was given each
and every day to believe this possible
each and every
day to long
again each and every day to slake
the longing
and the one who
did not believe in the fairytale
life refused to have anything to do with

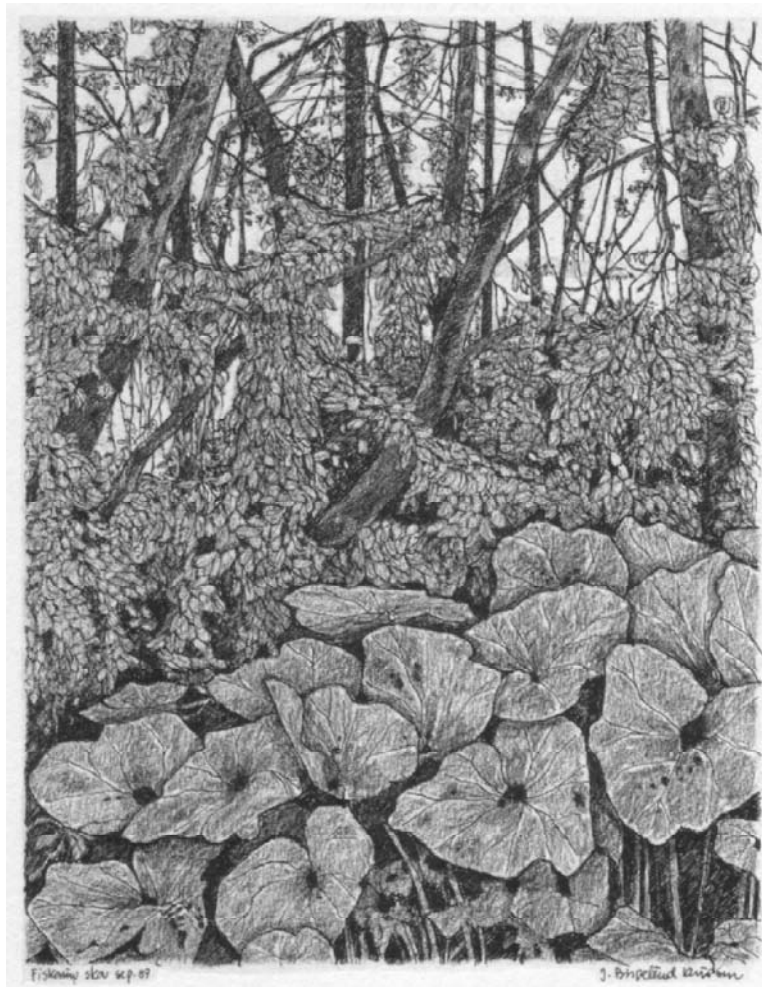
all other fairytales only existed
for the sake of
this one fairytale
(no matter how beautiful they were
illustrated by
vilhelm petersen
and lorenz frølich) because this
fairytale led
you in to
the meaning of life because this
fairytale led you out to god

and we found a very particular
piece at the
foot of røjle
klint where we had never been
before – it was
a gull's wing that
looked like all other gull's wings (like
a variation on
the theme in carl
nielsen's piano music) and we knew
quite well how it was part of the whole

and we began to understand that
all these bits
and pieces were
themselves small fairytales in the
far greater fairytale
that was life
and that it was the meaning of life to
put together these
pieces to form
the whole which we could not
comprehend without god's help

and the brilliant thing about this game
was that it could
be played by
everyone – that it did not call for
any particular
kind of knowledge
that nothing was needed in the way
of other qualification
than of being
a human being than of being a
human being for better or worse

on the other hand it could
also be played
by everyone
because everyone had precisely
his own
pieces his
own small fairytales his own life
to be lived – the game
then was for
everyone and only for everyone and
that was what was so brilliant about it



that was why it was impossible to
cheat by
for example
allowing the other one to play life
for one or
by borrowing
some pieces from some third party
let along by
swapping
certain pieces – no everyone had
exactly his own life to live

what the individual pieces
bits and
fragments looked like
depended on the conditions and
small fairytales of
the individual's life
but the rules were the same for
everyone the pieces
had to be put together
to form one whole and the glue that held
them together was love sincerity devotion

and this great fairytale was more
hazardous and far
more adventurous
than all the small ones put together
admittedly it
had no trolls
and witches and dogs with eyes as
big as mill
wheels but at
every corner of the road the human
heart's small cruelty was lurking

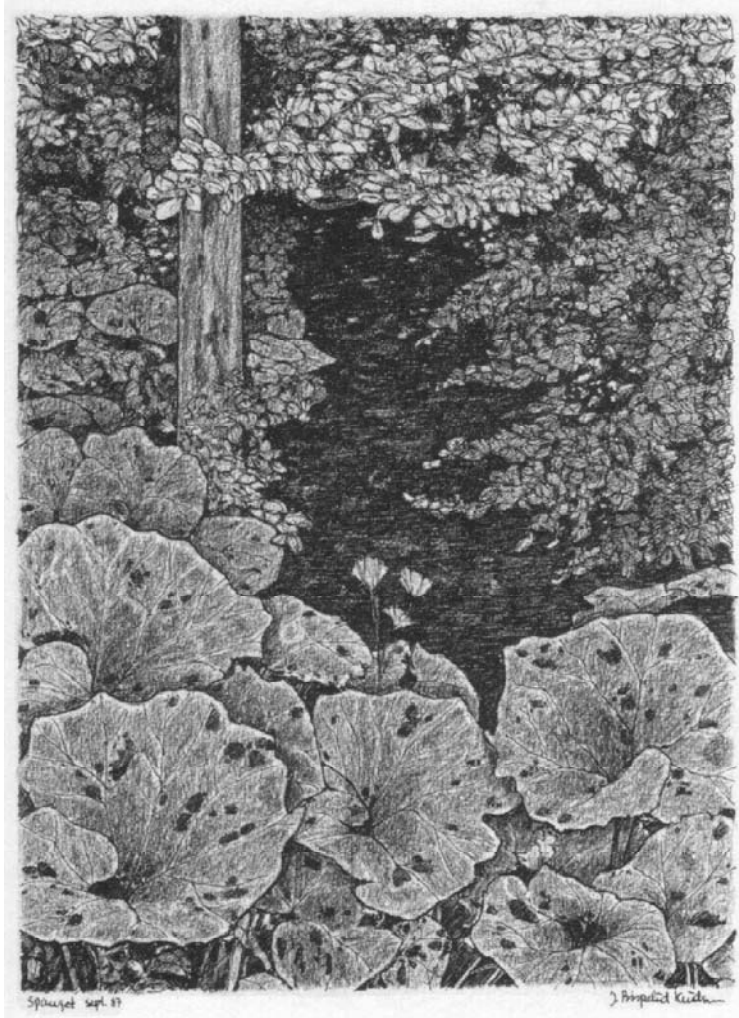
behind every stone on the shore
wretchedness lay
in wait at
every dog rose's enchanted castle
the small meanness
of the human heart tempted
(your own heart it should
be noted) under every
grain of sand the thousand medusa
eyes of the spell threatened

oh the small meanness of the heart
and its halfness
oh the small
greed and envy that waited
for you at
every pine tree
oh the small betrayal of
your best friend
that was far
crueller than the great
sell-out in the book of fairytales

oh the great boredom that attacked
the heart like
ergot right in
the field of rye – oh the
deadly in
difference
that locked you in in yourself
oh the futility
over all the
stones in your path oh the heart's small
thimble that you emptied in the sand

see these were the dangers the traps
of the great fairytale
how on earth were you
to overcome them? – i had
written it for you
you were
to strike a light with the tinderbox
once for faith
twice for hope and
three times for love – then the
spell would be broken at once

and we walked out along this line
like walking the
plank – on this
bathing jetty at skåstrup strand:
“you danish tongue
you are my
mother speaking” – and we really
did hear my
mother’s voice
deep within the poem as if she was
calling from the far side of the sea



and we placed our trust in tansy
and in dog rose
more than in
so much else – and we relied
blindly on
the swallows that
flew in and out of the poem's open
holes and we
found two blue
fluted fragments that fitted together
each in the other's heart

and under the low cliffs at
nørreby hals
we listened to
the lupine pods that burst with
small pops
like eggs in
the saucepan or the scratches
on the record with
carl nielsen's
first sonata or like my mother's
mahogany sideboard in the early hours

i had still not yet used the word
'happiness' perhaps
mostly because
it seemed to me to resemble a
pea pod emptied
of its peas – but
also because i was still a bit
afraid of
'tempting happiness'
as if it cost something – as if
it was not a gift and an extra bargain

happiness almost resembled one of
those long
chess games in
the king's indian where deep
within the
middle game
one suddenly sees the winning
move as a
combination
between hard work and the
surprising touch of inspiration

and was i happy then myself?
at any rate
in those moments
when inspiration touched
my heart and yours
my beloved
just before menstruation and if
the daily grind
with the averbach
variation could be included then
i probably was a happy man

and i crossed over to the second
sonata via some
low raspberry thickets
because i thought i was to look for
a quite particular
piece of the past
there – but the fourth memory
was not to be found
on this shore
the totality too apparently also had
its blind white spots on the map

it was difficult as already stated – life
was difficult
day out and day
in to tend the traps i had
set up in language
and realise that
they were mostly empty or that only
the word ‘the
mallow’s skipper’
had got caught in the net and not
larger and more high-flying words



it was easy as already stated – life
was easy it
was so easy
just to let things slide and say:
what do i care
about ‘the mallow’s
skipper’ – it was so easy
to let it sit
there with folded
wings in language without a
thought of setting it free again

and that was the fifth mistake
to register and
to catalogue
to write down 'the mallow's
skipper' in the
etymological works
to use the words only as words –
because the mallow's
skipper would then also
end up one fine day on its pin
in the butterfly collector's showcase

it was so difficult to fill up the days
it was so difficult
to realise that
fulfilment began with precisely these
small events
it was far
easier to empty the days of content
and meaning – to say:
what do i care about
the mallow's skipper or the sunset
for that matter or the rain

it was far easier to feel hurt
every time the
world fell
apart every time the mirror
shattered into
tiny pieces it
was far easier to shut oneself
inside one's own
small fairytale
it was in actual fact far
easier to remain unhappy

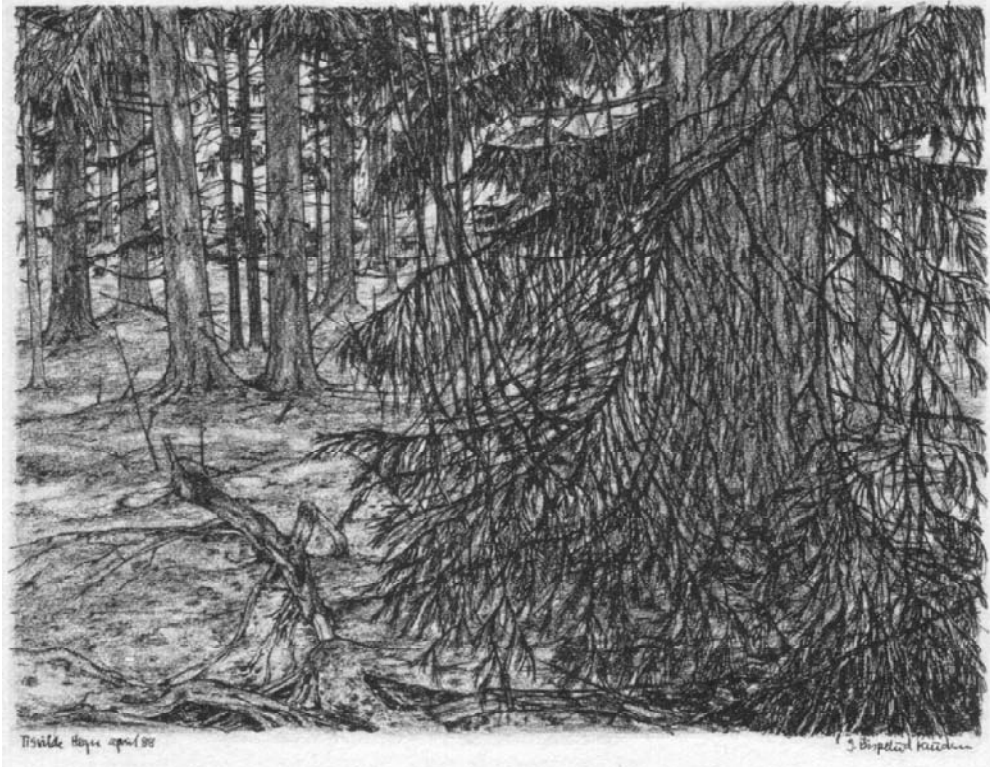
it was so difficult to realise that
life was the
totality you your
self had created that life's meaning
consisted precisely
in putting it together
again and again because it (or rather
the insight) could
not be retained
it was so difficult to realise that it was nothing
else that the fairytale was mostly hard work

and i shut
“des knaben
wunderhorn”
for the last time i shut the green
leather volume – i left german
high romanticism
in order to seek for other fairytales
in the world of
reality where the price was twice
as high and the reward only half
as much – i sought
inwards into life’s
own fairytale

and i walked
along the shores
at vejby fed
alongside the danish language
and the sea to the other side
which filled
it with salt and iodine and
fairytales from
the sunset’s huge iron foundry
fairytales as real and true
that no
one would
believe them

and when we
had reached
the other side
of the fourth symphony the corn stood
ripe between our souls like a
faint reflection of
what was to come and since you
could neither
grasp this with your intellect nor
with your common sense i have
written this
poem for your
heart my love

the field fires
came earlier than
usual this
year already around st laurentius
the large widow's veil of smoke hung
on the horizon
and for a couple of days i felt more
united with
the dead than with the living
more in harmony with the fait
accompli of the
dead than was
good for me



and i could wake
up in the middle
of the night
bathed in sweat and ask myself:
what's it all leading to? – when you're
lying in your
bed you would rather be walking
down by the sea and
when you're walking down by the sea
you would rather be lying in your bed –
and then i
turned over and
slept some more

but when i
woke up in
the morning i
knew the answer i knew well how
this longing was to be slaked and
i knew also
that the brief moment of happiness
that i was
working my way towards was worth
all the effort all the night's night
mares and all the
day's small intri
cate fairytales

i was also
very well aware
that it was
not life that was shattered but only
the wholeness of the understanding
each time it reached
its fulfilment each time i believed
that i had now
understood life's meaning each
time i imagined to myself that the
great fairytale had
revealed its
secrets to me

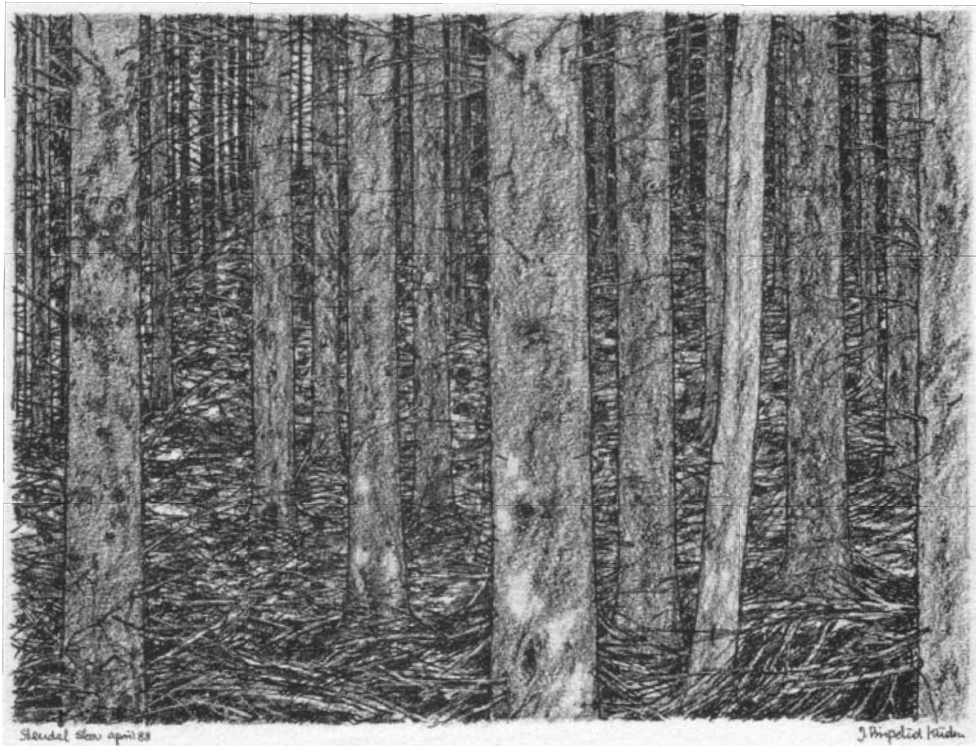
i therefore shaved
with great care
practically every day
i therefore spread out gravel and pebbles
on the garden paths i therefore moved
the white bishop after
mature consideration i therefore walked
with you along
the shores i therefore took care of
my love because i deep down had a
suspicion that
precisely these acts
constituted life's meaning

i therefore listened
to carl nielsen's
wind quintet
i therefore planted a small buddleia
in the south border i therefore looked
like that at you my love
because i knew that these acts
were the necessary
conditions for experiencing the great
fairytale for realising again one
fine day that
this totality was
also life's meaning

i therefore assumed
this hard grind
this daily
task of living (this never-
ending battle against the flies) i
therefore transformed
all this toil and moil into
desire and joy
(pressed the apples into cider) all
this death that i had attended
because this
mosaic was
life's meaning

i therefore each day
put together the bits
and pieces again
i therefore waited each night for the
final insight even though i knew
that god would scatter
the whole with one stroke of lightning
(or rather the
understanding of the whole) once more
because this insight could only definitely
be retained
in death's
completed work

there were no
truths or
fallacies in
these small events no logical
pitfalls – not until they were translated
into the domain of
language and understanding's strange
labyrinths – each of
these small incidents contained its
own clarity which was neither more
nor less
true or false
than life itself



the mistake was
solely due to the
lack of faith the
hopelessness and the lukewarm love
because only these three could stick
the pieces together again
the intellect's rebis the memories and
the heart's shards
(from the white urn) because only
these three could join existence
together into the
knot that was
life's meaning

and deep within
august's lacunae
the wheat blackened
in an ivory sheen that indicated
it was now ripe for harvesting
and the shooting
stars filled the treasure chests
of the great bear
with jewels as brilliant as
those i had inherited from my
mother – and i was
no longer afraid of
happiness

and the shores
stretched
farther than the
eye could see and farther than could
be measured farther than longing
the shores
stretched in along the innermost
sea where
we once bathed in our childhood
and commanded a mighty fleet
consisting of
at least twenty
mussel shells

and even farther
the shores stretched –
out behind
the moon and round the sun far
ther than the heart – through
hans andersen's songs
'with wild swans' nests' – far
ther than the
fairytale and death – right out to
the world's end the shores stretched
where i one day
would once more
meet my mother

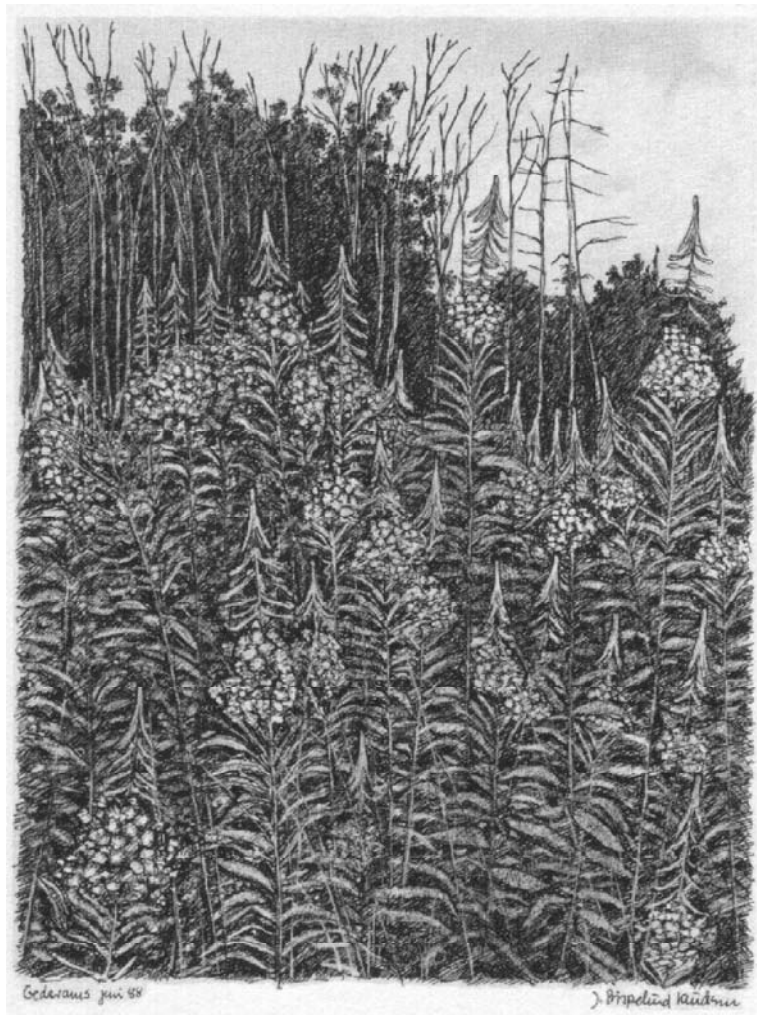
and the shores
stretched
between the decade's
last months like a congealed
suture that would soon heal
when the eighties
closed behind us as that
which had
been – when the eighties put
out their sun-topaz in the depths
of the heart
as the love that
had been lived

and i left
behind three
urns in the soil
of this decennium a grey plastic
one a white one and a red
ceramic one
sealed with my love's
final words
three strange fairytales each of which
told its version of life's meaning
each within
its own
closed book

nor did we
make the
sixth mistake:
to focus on the whole – partly
because it was clearly impossible
and partly
because even if it had been
possible it would
still have been an erring of the mind
to compare ourselves in such a way
with death – like
poaching on
god's preserves

and most of my
time was spent
doing practically
nothing – certain studies of the
stones' position in the gravel
or just
staring out of the window along
the white sight lines
of the jet trails or removing a
grey hair from an eyebrow – life's
meaning usually
consisted of
almost nothing

but make no
mistake: it was
precisely round
these minimal grains of sand of
“almost nothing” that existence
crystallised
just as in the fairytale where it
was the small white
stones and buckwheat grains that
enabled you to find
your way
back to
reality again



the memories
could also become
so precious that
their sentimental value over
shadowed the events from which
they derived as the
plaques from the royal copenhagen
porcelain manufactory
my mother had collected to remind her
of her life and which year
by year had
acquired
their own value

those kinds of memories
we mercilessly
smashed or
we sold them for five kroner apiece
to the antique shops of the county
of funen
those kinds of souvenirs we threw out
ruthlessly
also inside ourselves just as the poems
that acquired patina and began
to remind one
of or to
resemble "poems"

and the last
field fire
ever
flared up only ten metres from
our windows and the fire sounded
like a violent
shower of rain on the outhouse roof's
corrugated iron
or like the most concentrated
passages in the lucifer suite
or simply
like burn
ing straw

and the smoke
hung like a bee
keeper's net
in front of the face hiding our
innermost feelings and the messages
we were sending
up to god along the heat's lines of force
as once back
in childhood when we let small
notes with magic formulas
glide up the
string to the
kite high above

and it was a
solace to see the
hinterland in
flames to burn the straw's bridges –
it was such a relief to be
present when an
entire era went up in smoke and soot
such a
great release to see the past dis
appear like black fire-traces
far behind us
down by the
apple orchard

and the next
day we saw that
only the elm
trees along the boundary had been
damaged their leaves curled like iron
we though
followed the second symphony
down to
the seashore at fønsskov strand
where we cooled off after the heat
from this
great pyromaniac
fire of the spirit



“the tinderbox”

i did not really believe
that that sort
of dog existed – but just
look – there sat my
mother’s dog
(which i had
inherited) with ears as big
as roast beef and eyes
black as
the opening of
a double-barrelled shot-gun and
a nose colder than the north pole

and i struck a light with
the tinderbox once
with the whole force of faith (i
really had found an
old lighter
brand-name 'zippo'
out in the wood near a hollow tree)
and i saw that the flame was a
flame and not
anything at all
else – and i saw that because
the flame lit itself up

and i struck a light with
the tinderbox twice
with the whole force of hope – and i
saw that life's meaning was
precisely this
wholeness this
great fairytale this holy
reality which i was only able
to see by the
spirit's flame even
though no change had come about
except that caused by the light

and i struck a light with
the tinderbox thrice
with the whole force of my love
and look there you really stood
my beloved
in the most
burning bridal dress of your nakedness
and you lit up this reality –
and i saw
that no other
fairytale at all was given
and exactly that was the fairytale

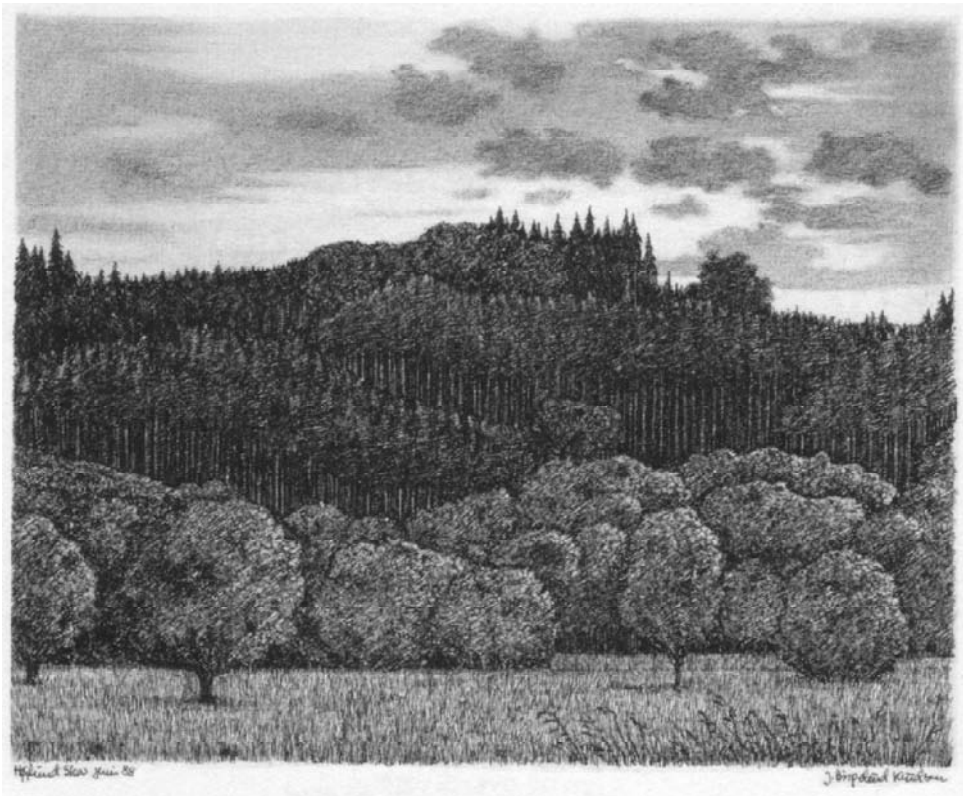
i did not really believe
that that sort
of dog existed – but just
look – there sat my
mother's dog
(which i had
inherited) with ears as big
as roast beef and eyes
black as
the opening of
a double-barrelled shot-gun and
a nose colder than the north pole

the seventh
mistake would
then be to
believe that we knew anything when all
we knew was that we believed something
about the
totality which we had called
the holy
reality when all we had achieved
was simply once more to be
impaled on the
blackthorn of
the paradox

and look – once again
the mountain of glass
slid apart into bits
and pieces and unanswered questions –
“what was it the meaning of life
actually was?”
i had only just grasped it –
“what reality?”
i had only just realised it
back to square one – did this poem
fit precisely
this page
at all?

if the great
fairytale was
life itself
how was i then to interpret the
real fairytales in their leather
volumes among
lorenz frølich's drawings? – if
death really
was life's highest meaning (and it
is that in a negative sense) how
was i then to affirm
a positive definition
without this knowledge?

the answers would
become too big
they would blow
the questions to smithereens
or the answers would become too
many and overshadow
the questions (just as the sum
of the parts is
sometimes greater than the whole
they form) the answers would fill
my mouth like hot
potatoes of
inexpressibility



or to put
it another
way:
the questions had become answers
and the answers questions – which
meant that
i was left high and dry that
once again
i was completely at a loss in a
awful confusion of flowers and words
which i would
yet again bind
into a poem

it had been
raining in
the night i
could smell when i awoke with
the third symphony in my head
from the day before
just as green it smelled out in
reality
and i took the nighttime rain as a
provisional answer to all my
questions about
life and
life's meaning

it was not
easy even though
i was playing
white that time in the return
game against death and especi-
ally not when
i refused to accept death as
life's highest
meaning but my hand did not
tremble in the slightest when i
placed out the bait
in the form of a
poisonous pawn

what was it
i could not
understand? – why
could i not simply make do with
my life being a whole – why
did i absolutely
have to try to understand something
that could not be
understood? – because it was far too late
i had after all already understood that
which i could not
understand – the intellect
had got caught in its own fox trap

in the depths of
the flute concerto
i found carl
nielsen's childhood home with window
panes of sugar and a pancake roof and
in the small rooms
inside precisely the flute concerto
could be heard over
the old loudspeaker system like a never-
ending recourse and feedback in my brain
i had come across
the fairytale of
self-knowledge again

but it was not
all that difficult
to find the way
back this time – all i needed to do
was take a decision – to end
the reflection
to turn off the gramophone – all
i needed to do
was to find the small words i had
thrown out on the way: ‘i’ – ‘love’ – ‘you’
then i was
out of the spell
at once

then my
identity
was no longer
a problem even though i did not
understand it i was at every
moment myself
my own wholeness without being
able to understand it
and that was precisely the intellect’s
paradox: to have to put the pieces
together to form
a whole that it itself
could not understand

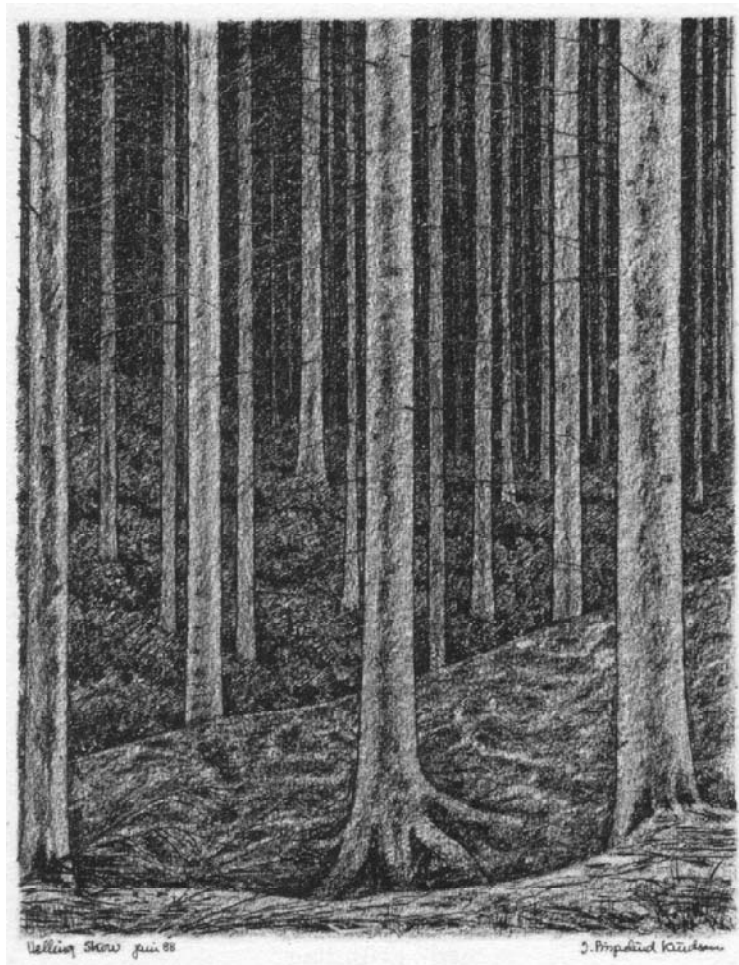
that was life's
laborious task
to put the pieces
of the mirror together again with its
intellect and glue them into place
with the whole force
of its love – that was life's
meaning: in an
instant shorter than a stroke of
lightning to see the whole before
the mirror once more
shattered into a thousand
and one fairytales

i had after
all warned you
i had after all said
that it was a heartbreaking job
at times more monotonous and
without hope of success
than the daily shave – i had after all
written that the reward was doubtful
i had after all implied that the mirror's
ultimate perfection
was synonymous
with death

in that way
life's highlights
and death apparently
resembled each other more than was
a good idea or maybe it was all just
as good – this was
of course only a matter of conjecture
as i was
still alive – but the possibility
made me feel happy even so
consoled me
in some way
or other

it was a
question of
pure speculation
and notions and nothing could be
further from my mind than to make the
eighth mistake:
that of mixing faith
and knowledge
in a cocktail of altar wine
i stood as firm as a rock on
reality
and the stony
foundation of life

and since my
mother was dead
she could just
as well be properly dead – exactly
as i who was alive could just as well
be properly
alive in order to demonstrate
the absolute
demarcation which only the cheaters
of the heart and swindlers of the spirit
“overstepped” with
their stilts and
seven-league boots



“the tinderbox”

i did not really believe
that that sort
of dog existed – but just
look – there sat my
mother’s dog
(which i had
inherited) with ears as big
as roast beef and eyes
black as
the opening of
a double-barrelled shot-gun and
a nose colder than the north pole

nevertheless i was stupid enough
or superstitious
enough (who knows?) to invoke
my mother’s spirit from the third
urn by
striking a light
thrice with the tinderbox again
and i said to it: i do not
want anything
else than this
life in all its beauty – and i knew
that this was a very big wish

i persisted with my childishness
by a striking a light
with the tinderbox twice
and thereby summoning the spirit
of the white urn
and i said to
it: of you i wish my poetry
to be able to display just
a little of
all this
beauty – and i knew that
this too was a big wish

so as to complete the number
of stupidities
i finally struck a light with the
tinderbox once more to invoke
the spirit of
the first urn:
may death take me by surprise
one fine day among the roses
at a fell swoop
as clean as
love itself – and i knew that
this was the biggest wish of all

i did not really believe
that that sort
of dog existed – but just
look – there sat my
mother’s dog
(which i had
inherited) with ears as big
as roast beef and eyes
black as
the opening of
a double-barrelled shot-gun and
a nose colder than the north pole



on the first of
september i walked
across the fields
to my neighbour's house which had
burnt down during the last field fire
in august and
in the midst of the ruins i found a
grimy hymn book
that lay open at the remains of this
line: oh god who hast
founded thy
church on
this spot

there were lines too
by peter dass from
before the reformation
and even though it would take more
than a normal compulsion neurosis
to make anything
more than chance out of this event
and of this
coincidence i nevertheless thought
for a long while about the burnt-out
man's roof
right opposite
our own house

the fifth memory
had hardly anything
to do with reality
at all more enclosed as it was
in its own symbolism
of gladiolus
and pentangles because it was
my mother's
birthday on the fifth of
september – gleaming like
an aura around
the photo on
the window-sill

“oh – all my
tears” my
mother had
noted in the margin of the book i was
reading right now – “oh all my tears”
how was i
who wept so rarely to grasp
the profundity of
this statement? – how was anyone
who had not followed in my foot
steps to grasp
anything else than
the poem's text?

for a long time
i had looked at the hill
to the west red
with helium when the sun set
in a thicket that looked like a
crown of thorns –
for a long time i had considered
this ridge without
going beyond its sharply whetted scythe
because i assumed that beauty was
perhaps even
greater out there
behind the after-glow

and when i finally
stood on the
other side of
the hill i was not disappointed but
not convinced either – because i
realised the
simple fact that beauty was
neither something
given that i was made a present of
nor something i myself could create
with the aid
of my words and
notions

but among
them – not
necessarily
in the middle like an emerald but
between the given and the words
hidden in
the obvious i could if i was
fortunate
find beauty or rather
receive it as a coup
de grâce when
my seeking had
come to a halt



the fairytales
continued along
the shore at
àlehoved on into the clarinet
concerto where the willows
stood over a
hundred years old keeping
watch over
secrets into which we would
never be initiated no matter
how close we
laid our ear to
the great trunks

and even though
i listened intensely
to a flintstone
with bands as beautiful as the
ribbons of the order of the dannebrog
i could only hear
a soft sighing inside my head –
i was not able
to hear “my mother’s gentle voice”
not even when i repeated the words
out loud
three times
to myself

and since i
was no longer
hiding anything
(not from myself at any rate) there was
not anything to be revealed any longer
either since i
was no longer playing hide and seek
with myself
i no longer needed to look at myself
in the mirror every day and ask:
“who goes there?
who in all the
world is that?”

the difficulty
rather consisted
conversely in
putting the pieces together again
every day so when i looked at myself
in the mirror
during my morning shave i could
just say: oh –
there you are old pal – that’s you
without a doubt holding the razor
in your hand –
so everything’s
fine again

the difficulty
probably consisted
more in the
temptation that i would flee in
among the enchanted castles of
the rugosa bushes –
that i would lose my way into
other fairytales of
multiplicity where i would then
have to find a way out on my own
under the huge
sky-canopy
of the dock leaves

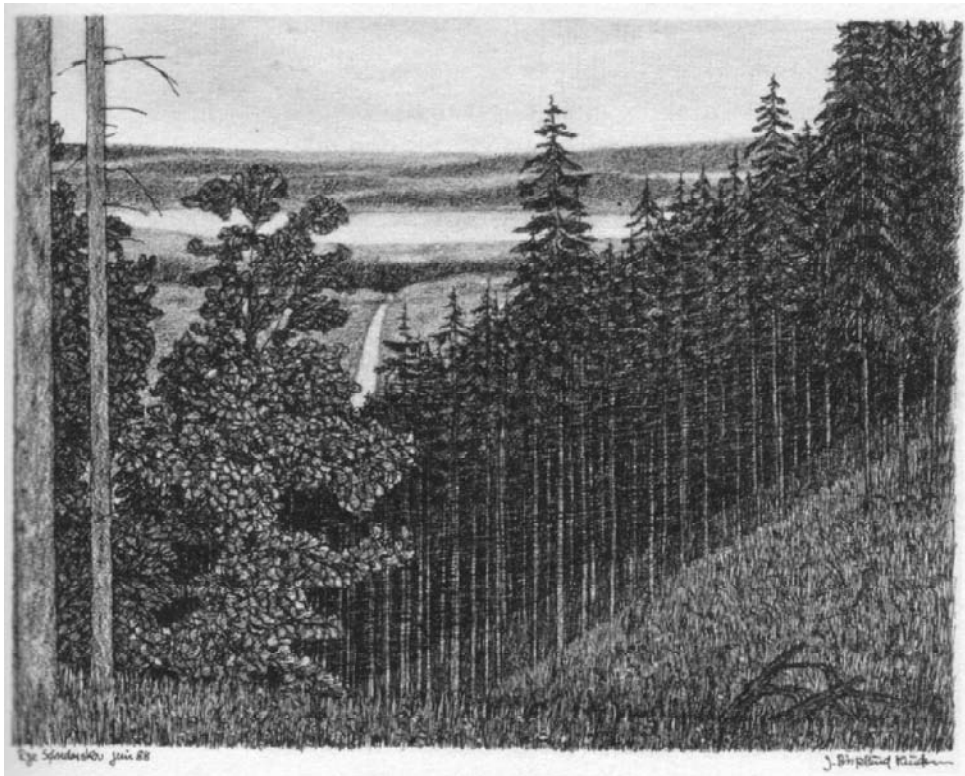
the hard
work probably
consisted more in
keeping hold of the insight while i
put the pieces together again to
form the only
real fairytale – for it was precisely
the fairytale
that i had already found what
i so ardently wanted to find:
my own
life's
meaning

the ninth mistake
was also extremely
easy to make
the mistake of the pure spirit: to
imagine that you had understood this
paradox – to
imagine that you had understood life's
meaning but then
the punishment would also be as swift
as the purest tautology:
that life's
meaning is
life's meaning

and as sure as
eggs is eggs
the tenth mistake
would follow in its wake: the mistake
of the impure spirit where you
said to yourself:
"i do not understand it – i do not
understand life's meaning"
and just as unerringly the punishment
would strike you like a flail-blow of light:
for then you had
after all grasped your
own life's meaning

and totality's mirror
flickered once more
and became unclear
here in the early autumn like the
surface of the lake that was ruffled
and riddled by
the duckhunters' shot while we
attempted to
place yet another couple of the pieces
of reality into the darker shadows
so as to
make it
clear again

and on the chess
board i moved
the white rook
back to the base line outside
which life actually began – and
i knew that
once more i had outwitted death
and once more
i had postponed the temptation
even though this game too could
best be characterised
as some sort of
a waste of time



in the sixth memory my mother
stood among the roses
in blue
overalls watering them while
she said
something or
other to me who was no longer
listening
since
no one can be present among
the roses in his own memory

of all the reasons that are given
for not looking
for something
you have lost i chose the one of
not looking for
my mother because
i knew in which wood i could
find her and i
was not going
there for a while yet – there were
so many fairytales i had to tell first

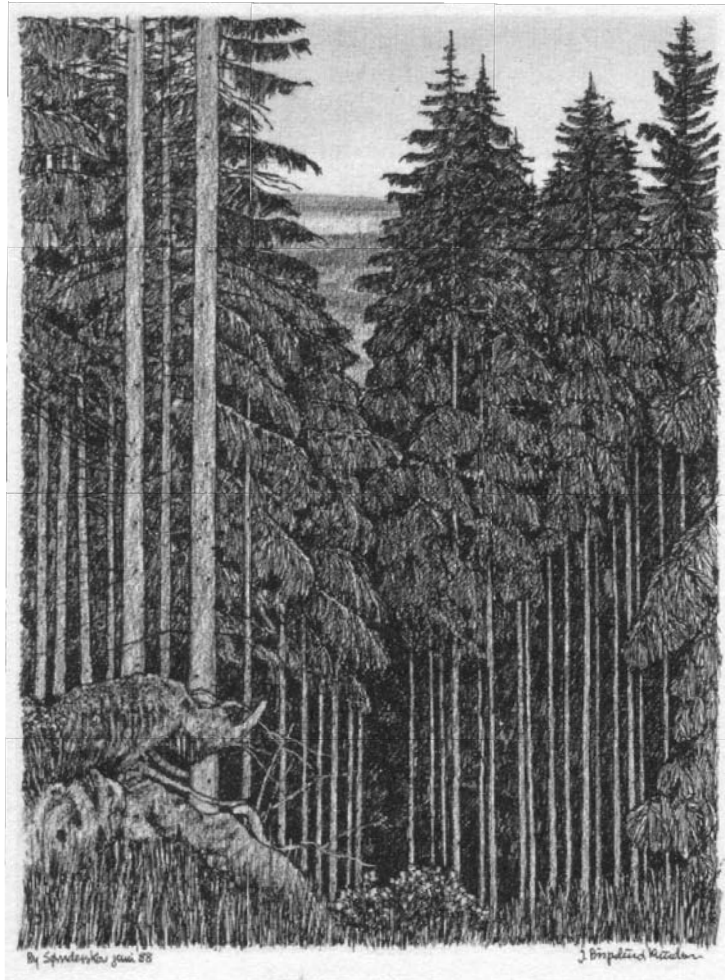
so we sat down beneath the red
hawthorn in the
southwest
corner of the garden and told
each other fairytales
as beautiful as the
sunset as intimately familiar as
the small
suite for strings
fairytales so true that they more
than resembled reality

i write explicitly “more than
resembled”
because there was
an insight’s difference between
what was the
same and thereby
belonged together namely
reality
and the great
reality which we for want of a
better word had called: the fairytale

the only difference was the difference
itself – which is
another way
of saying it: that the difference
was in the
existence
or to put it another way or in
a different
key: that
reality was nothing at all
other than itself

why was it so difficult? - once
again we had
landed up with the
self-evident or what others would
call the insigni-
ficant – why was
it so difficult to put it into words?
because we were
once more standing
at the sea of the inexpressible here
by the shore at wedelsborg?

here where the sea was like the breast
of a winged
teal – here
where we apparently were only able
to say teal
or 'teal'
even though we knew better or
rather believed
ourselves capable of
grasping the whole for a brief instant
even though we knew this was impossible?



why couldn't we just say:
"in denmark i
was born 'tis
there my home is" – or sing:
"from there my
roots and there
my world extend" – or let
aksel schiøtz
sing it?
why did we have to grasp the whole?
because that was life's meaning

it was not a question of
getting out of
the circle (the
vicious circle) for that
was impossible –
it was a
question of following the circle
(the good circle)
in a proper
fashion as when we walked
along the garden's bramble fence

just as you cannot decide
in a dream that
it is a dream
(being awake is called for to
do so) you
cannot decide
in reality that it is reality
(for this would
likewise call for
a state that is outside reality)
you've woken up to wednesday morning

you have to go right out to god
(or right in to
god if you prefer)
round the entire circumference
of the circle
degree by degree
in order to gain this state
this redemption
for one brief
moment where reality shows
itself for what it is: reality

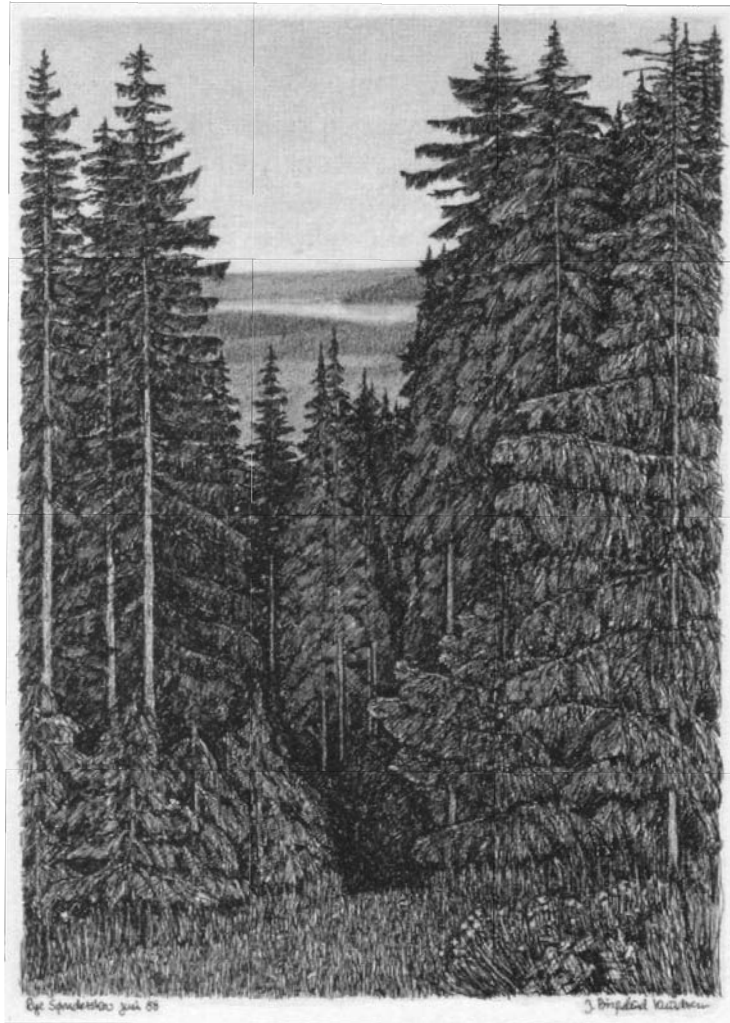
and there we stood one early morning
in september's light
(my hand did
not tremble as i wrote this)
we stood in
the chalk-white
light of eternity – and we fled out
into the darkness
again because we knew
the price for staying at this still
point where light and light become one

we had looked inwards to life's meaning
for a brief second
(with a sideways
glance) and we now walked along
another shore
in order to pick
up the pieces once again of the
totality we were but
unable to
understand (implicitly at most) no matter
how much we twisted our brain out of joint

it was poor consolation that so
much grief had
been extinguished
with my mother's death so many
tears had
dried into
salt so much pain – it was
poor consolation
because i
could not feel this peace of
the wholeness only understand it

but i assumed that it was the
same wholeness we
were dealing with
even though there was a world
of difference between
them even though they
were separated by eternity but
thus also joined
together by the
fraction of a second – the one simply
seen objectively the other subjectively

if i was right live and death
were two sides
of the same
wholeness – and when i considered
how great a joy
those moments
gave me how i experienced
the fullness
of life
then death could not be all
that bad – well could it?



i left this motley of specu
lations even though
they perhaps
(via the radius of a moonbeam)
ultimately
led to
the garden of eden as in andersen's
fairytales – i
left them
in favour of my own garden where
precisely the east wind was blowing today

it was now a question of taking care
for there was only
this reality
once and for all – it was now a
question of living
out time and
not killing it with unavailing
speculations
as to who
i was and why i was in this
the one and only of all worlds

so we drew a hard and fast line
around us like
a ring of fire –
for even though the sum of all our
acts could perhaps
be calculated
and predicted as necessity or
destiny each
of the individual
acts was free – we were free
to love – there life's meaning began

we had become the champions of
reality for the
better or worse
of the fairytales – because the real
fairy tale itself
displayed reality
while the other fairytales ended
blindly in their
own fantasies
and thereby also marked off
reality with their hawthorn hedge

we had become the defenders of
the fairytales for the
better or worse
of reality – because the great
reality itself
was a fairy
tale and reality as a
reality reduced
the others to
books of fairytales where death was
only a word and consequently life also

in the seventh memory my mother
was wearing a white
coat of orlon
that matched her henna-dyed
hair – in the
seventh memory
my mother looked like a high
priestess – in
the seventh
memory my mother anointed my feet
in her specially equipped foot clinic

in late september we reached
the coast at
sparretorn
the sound track was still carl
nielsen's music
and this time
the first symphony whose
sky gleamed with
crystal violet
out over the sea or was it
really in over the poem?

the biggest mistake was probably
constantly keeping
an eye on the mistakes
so as to avoid them – hardly
daring to
take a single
step for fear of falling of
shrinking from
the words so that
the poem should not fail – not
daring to make the necessary mistakes



all the small fairytales were if not
precisely
mistakes
then small deviations from the wholeness
of the moment
which if not
exactly the truth were then at
least the only
thing that existed
they were small displacements
that opened the moment

and all the small fairytales were pieces
of a mirror
fragments that
in their own strange and distorted
way mirrored
each other
into a whole again which even so
was not
quite whole
since each piece of the mirror could
not separately mirror itself

and all the small fairytales together
made up
the great
fairytales – all the small bits
and pieces
together
made up the great mirror
which was also
unable to
mirror itself – but could only
mirror itself in god's invisible mirror

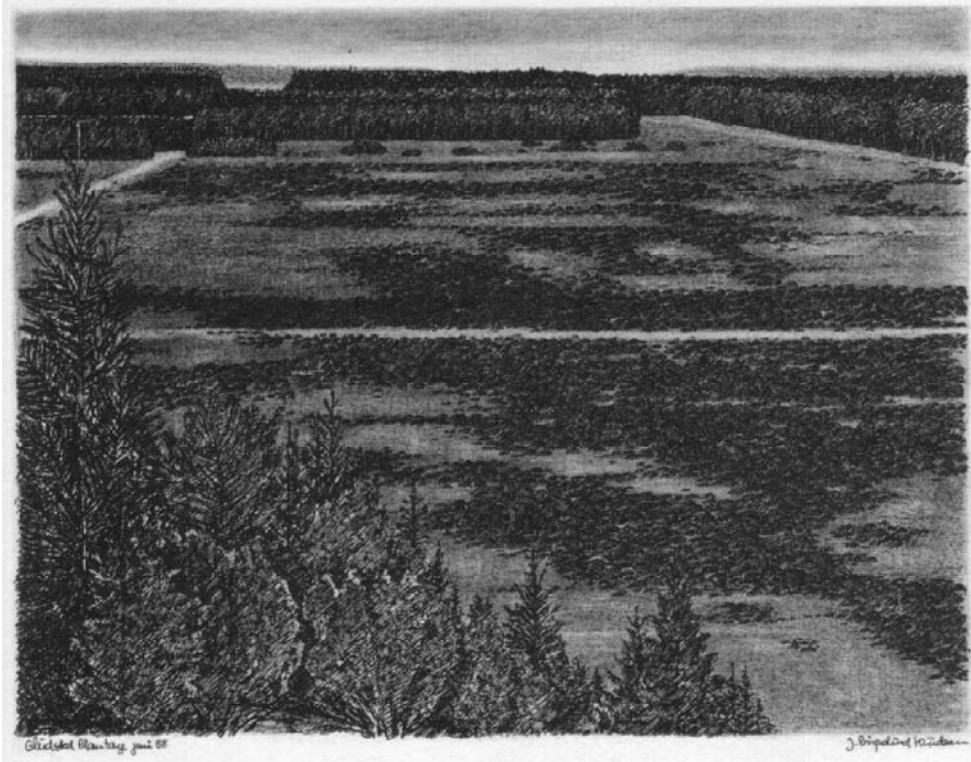
but we know from andersen's
fairytales (with
an opposite
conclusion) that this too had
to go wrong
because no one can
grasp his own totality not even
the mirror image
of it – so this
great fairytales mirror too had to
shatter into thousands of pieces again

or rather the mirror was shattered
into a thousand and one
fairytales all of
which led in to the great
fairytales again:
that reality is
the reality and the fairytales
are only
fairytales
all of which led in or perhaps
out to the great reality

then we once more went down
along the shore at
drejet down
towards enebærodde where the soul
smelled so
chaste – and we let
our thought roam along its own
straight lines
it was life's path
we were walking along – it was in
the flesh that the fulfilment took place

we were walking on life's crooked
paths and if
our thought
let us down and became "pure under
standing" – then
god help and
console us where the flesh would take
revenge – where
we would prick
ourselves on each and every rose thorn
and stumble over each and every flintstone

we were walking in life's labyrinths
and if the
flesh let
us down and became "pure biology" –
then god
help and
console us where thought would take
revenge where
we would
meet the one spectre after the
other in each and every snailshell



we were walking on life's crossroads
and if
the spirit
let us down and became "pure spirit"
then god help
and console us
where life would take revenge –
on us – where
we would be
reminded of reality's hard quartz
behind each and every second

and the thoughts that were not lived
served no purpose
no matter how
beautiful they looked and the spirit
that was not
lived was only
a bad thing – it was in the flesh
that the proof
was to be given
it was of flesh and blood that the spirit
was to live – it was the flesh that redeemed

the great events marched through
our lives
like autumn
gales in october without our being
able to
influence things
in any way – like the dissonances
in the sixth
symphony
it was the small so-called trivial
acts that gave us free play

that was why we made the most of
everyday life with its
yellow leaves at this
time of year and the weeds that stood
stripped and black
against the sky like
the club symbols on a pack of cards
we carried out our
small habits like
small ceremonies: drinking coffee and
reading fairytales in the afternoon

i didn't say that it was enough
only that it was
necessary
to pay attention from time to time
to the small miracles
of everyday life
and not perhaps even that – since
understanding is
only such an
infinitely tiny piece in the game
that could be called: life's meaning

how was i to know
how in the world
was i to be
able to comprehend what was
sufficient and
necessary for
my life to be able to be fulfilled
when this infinitely
tiny piece could not
even be contained in the self
same life so i could understand it?

there was no way i could either
but i relied
on god knowing
it – even though this did not
free me from
the responsibility
i still had to assume respons
ibility for the acts
i took in my life
for better or worse – what other
account was there to keep?

the sea on one side and land
on the other
it was not so
strange that we have chosen
the shores as
the concrete outcome
of this state of mind – it was
like walking among
willows and the elder
in the fairytales among too many
dreams and too small a reality



and the eighth memory appeared
in sharp focus before
my inner eye like
the photograph taken of midtskov
where my mother
was smiling like
i could not recall her ever having
smiled while
she was
alive – precisely because she was
not smiling to me from that photo

and the heron flew past my window
once again across
the up-turned
paraffin lamp of the sunset – or
was it just
the heron
from the twenty-eighth verse that
only now had
reached
this poem on its way from the
one fairytale to the other?

and south of wedelsborg we
turned down along
the coast in a
swirl of thistles that blew straight
out of the third
quartet and
the bramble thicket was flowering
here in october
as if it wanted to
remind us about something we had
forgotten in there in childhood's poem

what could it be that was so
beautiful that
it caused me
a pang forty years on like
a blackberry thorn?
perhaps a
fairytale the ending of which
i had only heard
in my sleep
after the evening prayer my
mother had once taught me?

but no matter how many fairy
tales i read
that autumn
i could not find the one that
was called “life’s
meaning” – i was
apparently unable to read myself
to it and for the
same reason also
unable to write life’s meaning – the
only path was to take that path myself

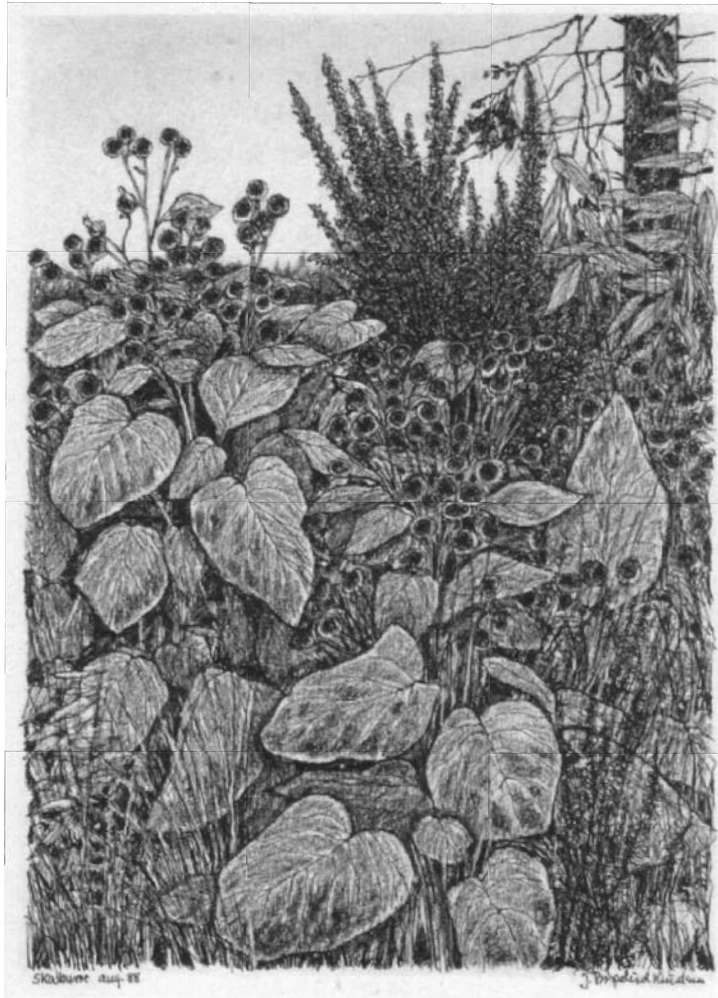
and so we did so one step
at a time two
steps forward and
one back – or vice versa – from
the living room out
to the kitchen and
back again up the stairs and
down the stairs
day out and day in
we walked the endless back and
forth between life and its meaning

or we walked as now on the
 rugård estate
 between umbra
and malachite in ever decreasing
 circles around
 the castle itself
which lay at the centre of the
 fourth quartet
 full of memories
about events and occurrences
that we had never experienced

and the days passed in life as
 in dreams
 faded away like
smoke behind the horizon's mirror
 while we once
 more strayed
among the fairytales' willows
 whose leaves
 did not wither and
blacken with the first night frost
because time was only pretending

why was it so difficult – why did
the writing crawl
off so slowly
beneath the paper lantern of
october as if looking
for a winter lair
why did it make these cold
blooded traces through
the poem? – perhaps
because i was afraid to cut the
final navel cord to my mother?

i had of course still got words
as an intermediary
a fragile bridge
across the abyss of reality
i was still able
to create a kind of
connection by writing ‘mother’
or ‘dear
mother’ – i
could still invent a fairytale – the
words were the last thing left



and it was the words i now had
to let go of
in relation to
my mother – for i could not go
on populating
the one poem
after the other with her old
figure of
a woman
it had to stop now – i had to
bury my mother in the words

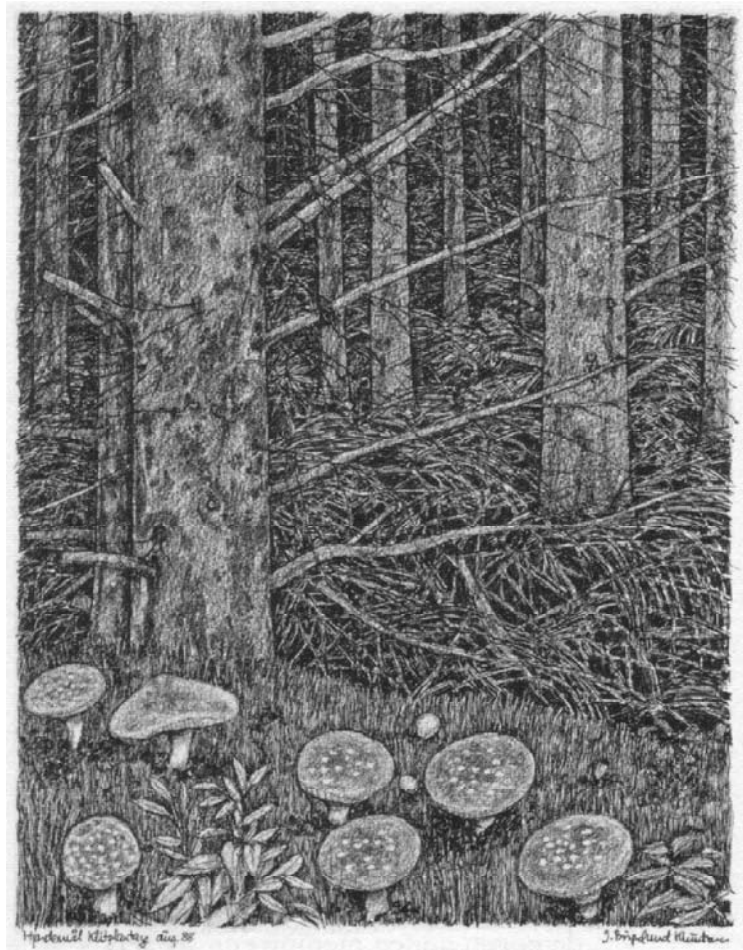
and so that is what i did – on
the last day of
october i 'buried'
'my mother' under a 'cherry
tree' in 'the
garden of eden' –
and that was a real fairytale
because it only
took place in
'reality' and not in the reality
where grass and forgetting grow

and the small fairytales covered
up reality
with words
so motley as the leaves that
swirled in from
october's
dark chests of drawers that still
stood up in
memory's attic
full of boy's books and exercise
books with red underlinings

and the great fairytales revealed
reality
as it was
without evasions and spider's webs
so that we
safely could say
"how beautiful reality is
but unfortunately
it is only
a fairytale" – so that we safely
could transform it into 'reality'

and the greatest fairytale concealed
itself once more
in its own light
enclosed itself in its own
clarity that was
so radiant
that we could not see it: the
secret that
there was
no secret – that life did not have
any other meaning than itself

and i went down to the shore again
at fogense point
which lay as
danish as ever in the dark light
of november
where my soul
was also ruffled by a light shiver
which would seem
to indicate that
my mother had finally shaped
her course for her own star



and in the ninth memory my mother looked
strictly and reproachfully at me from
her death bed as if she wanted to say: “you
ought to have been a doctor or at
least a lawyer and you only became a poet
but i can’t understand what you write”
and now it would never be able to be good enough

why was it so difficult to see what we saw
so difficult that we preferred the
fairytales’ cellophane and picture books where
the death caps probably stood much greener
along the edge of the wood though not nearly as
poisonous as in reality – why
was it so difficult to say things straight out?

only the dead-nettles were flowering on this all
souls' day where i was already up and
about too late as if time was passing
irregularly or as if i was trying to
draw out the days and was therefore suddenly
surprised that it had already
become november in my heart

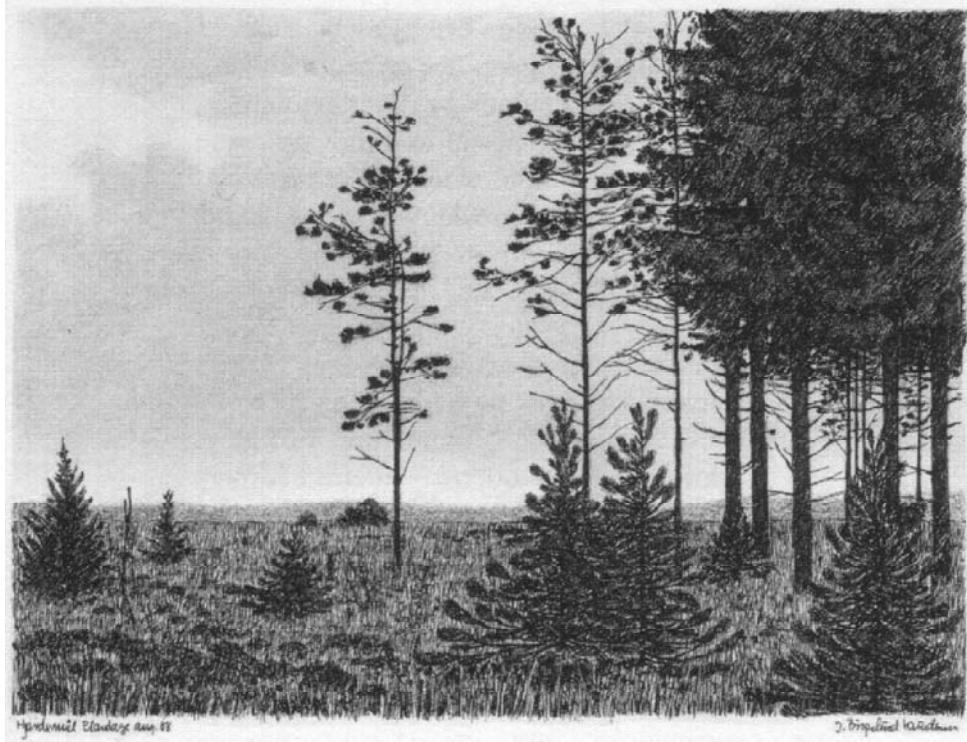
this of course was due to the circumstance
that an entire era of my life
had been placed in a bracket that i was
in vain seeking to remove so as to re-live
"waybackwhen" – but how was it? – didn't the
signs exchange value when this was done?
it was probably best to let the past be self-contained

then we could always later almost as in dreams
pay it a visit on the other side of the
equation (where two and two did not always
equal four) to find another couple of
pieces another couple of lines from the poem
we'd almost forgotten "green island home
on earth for heart to rest in" – for example

november grew yellow at the edges like the
maple hedge and the postcard from me to
my mother written with a firm and confident
hand that spanned the years like a bridge
that i now tore to pieces in order to demonstrate
that each piece in the puzzle itself
consisted of pieces in a completely different game

the winter gnats were once more dancing round
my head like electrons round the nucleus
and i had nothing more to ask about this muggy
afternoon not because i knew the answers –
but because he who does not ask does not need
answers either – or perhaps because
from now on i took life's meaning for granted

“travel on ye dead now that the sun is rising” –
i quoted freely from memory without being
able to recall from which book – but did the dead
exist at all? – what if that which was
absolutely different was precisely nothing
absolute nothingness? – in that case the dead
did not exist anywhere behind winter's rose hip



in that case (if god was absolute nothingness)
the dead were only to be found in
poems and fairytales – just like the unicorn –
was that the reason we wrote them? –
i let these thoughts run through my head
like a passing migraine
like the clouds' wings of coal over the sea

for life was the loveliest fairytale – so why
waste time and energy on wondering
to death about the dead and their ghosts
what was left of my mother apart from
the ashes i could after all only find in my
own heart among the sunset's cande
labra and preludio e presto per violino solo

why was it so difficult to realise that life
did not have any meaning but was
itself the meaning? – because this would
require outside help – from where outside?
if you did not know that now no one could help
you any more on this morning with the shore
lying like an emerald tablet with its own writing on it

the concept 'meaning' implies a relationship
i.e. that you relate to something which
thereby gains meaning – and you can precisely
not relate to life taken to its logical con-
clusion because you yourself are life you cannot
relate absolutely to yourself – absorb yourself
so to speak – but that's an old fairytale – let it be

likewise nor could death constitute life's meaning
since no one existed any longer
to relate to – but if you said: everything is life –
you were actually saying: nothing is life –
or in other words: everything is death – that was
why it was so important to maintain
death without therefore becoming addicted to it



death on the other hand defined life in this word's
true meaning – it bordered the shores
of life where the rugosa stood like a last defence
it encircled life with its many strange fairy
tales which we would hear at some time or other
and if we did not recognise death's reality
how would we ever be able to value life?

ou – ou – out! set out – the wind sang in the
willows and in the wormwood that rose
up on winter's rusty threshold – ou –ou – out!
set out the wind sang in the mind's darkroom
where the tenth memory lay retouched by death's light
ou – ou – out! set out the wind sang in
the heart and in the birches' black broomsticks

and the south wind blew the heart red with
ochre and the east wind aired in the
lavender and silver paper of memory and
the west wind swept words and pictures
under the dark woodland carpet of the fairytale
and the north wind burned the sky pure
as an altarpiece with its household ammonia

and the stars gleamed more bright and clear than
those my mother had embroidered on
the christmas bell-pull once in my childhood
and the moon shone like a lord's prayer
over the hills and shores and i reconciled
myself once more to life even though i
would never get to understand its meaning

and i walked out into the last third of my life
in the confident assurance that
my knowledge would get less and less and
my mistakes ever fewer as a result
i walked out into the third of my life where
my own children ought long since
to have learnt their lesson had i had any

i walked into the third of my life where
the november fields lay covered with
hoar frost every morning – that time of life
when all fairytales had come true and
therefore only belonged to books – that time
late in life when i had made these words
my own: “tis you i love denmark my native land”

and along this line i walked out of the poem
as well as i had been able to remember it
among all the other fragments that i had tried
to put together to form this jigsaw puzzle
which in turn was only a piece in a far larger
game – along this line i walked out onto
the open shores that gleamed like my boyhood years

and i asked the great hawthorn tree whether
the silence was not a solace after all
that bird song all those blossoms and fairytales
that it had heard – and it did not answer
me more silent still that the frost of the dead in
early winter – the great hawthorn did not
even hear my question there within the benediction

and the more the interest in the comprehensible
decreased (and i knew that as soon as understand
ing had been put together in its puzzle it would shatter
immediately into a thousand pieces) the more
too the domain of the incomprehensible decreased
i could also say that understanding was replaced
by what is and the incomprehensible by the mysterious

but i also knew that i had to get round understanding
that there was no way of getting round it
otherwise i would only end up in unreason and
i did not want to reject reason on the basis
of unreason but of understanding itself – for only via
understanding could i gain insight into the
fairytale through reason reason is conquered



and the shores twisted round the mind
full of dream's stinking seaweed here in
december's twilight – there was no help to be had
in dreams either – they were only small
fairytales he hid in when we used to play
“hide-and-seeK” or “hunt the thimble” to
avoid the great and far more hazardous fairytale

but if i collected together all the thousand and one
fairytales beneath the winter sky would a new
fairytale then arise that was larger than
christmas – could it constitute life's meaning
or would they simply stand there as a collection
of poems in this book which i so aptly
could then call “fairytales”?

and it seemed to me that for a short moment
i thought the thought of fulfilment that
perhaps made up the innermost meaning of life
as if i grasped the real fairytale of my life –
but i also knew that it was a mirage brought
about by the winter solstice because the
totality of my thoughts was of course unthinkable

for to be a totality was not the same
as understanding that totality – the
former was the case the latter unthinkable
as this statement itself which presupposed
the understanding of what it means to be a
totality – where did then this thought come from
that was at all able to postulate the paradox?

the true mystic
was thus certainly
the one who
believed what his
eyes saw – the one
who believed that
the world was the
one and only miracle
the one who believed
that life was
the one and only
true fairytale

and this fairytale
i was to tell
as the last person
in my family i
had been assigned
to complete
this dark heroic poem
quite literally
more than in flesh
and blood – to shut
lock and place the
key under the poem

was that why
the stones on the shore
lay so still in the
sand and the pine trees stood
so reverently silent because
they were listening
to their own fairytale
was that why the
scentless camomile
was still flowering so
late in december because
it itself was a fairytale?

once upon a time there
was a poet whose task
it was to tell
a fairytale about
everything that did not tell
its own fairytale
(for if it did so
there was no reason to
re-tell it) – was the
poet now to tell
his own
fairytale or not?

if he told it
 he belonged to
 those who told it
so he ought not
to tell his fairytale
 and if he
 did not tell it
 he belonged to
 those who did
not tell it
so he ought
to tell his fairytale

 was it that which
i had tried to tell
 that the fairytale could
 not be told because
 the words got in the way
but which could
not be left untold either
since after all it
 was a fairytale
or in other words:
the fairytale was over
the fairytale could begin?

