

Mr. Ives and the Fourth-Removed

by Ralph Roger Glöckler

*Four excerpts translated by
Isabel Fargo Cole*

Elfenbein

About the book

German original title:
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Mr. Ives and the Fourth-Removed by Ralph Roger Glöckler is an unconventional take on the epistolary novel, loosely based on the biographies of Henry Cowell and Charles Ives – two of the USA’s outstanding early 20th-century avant-garde composers – and their wives. In a set of variations on these four lives, closely intertwined by friendship and trauma, the characters seek to articulate their experiences to an imaginary third party. Their hopeful, angry, sad and infatuated words keep circling back to the impossibility of conveying one’s innermost thoughts and yearnings. The eccentric artists’ hopes and fears form one theme of the book, as well as the bisexual Cowell’s conviction in court for seducing a teenage boy, and the repercussions this has on his relationships. Thus, between the lines the novel tells of sexuality in transformation. In a fascinating study of society and morals, Glöckler has composed a ragtime variation on four striking figures of modern music.

About the author

Ralph Roger Glöckler (born 1950) studied ethnology and other subjects in Tübingen. Following his poetry debut *Technische Innereien* (1973), his books have included the travelogue *Portugal* (1980) and the novels *Reise ins Licht* (1984) and *Die kalte Stadt* (1987). Glöckler has translated works by João Aguiar, Mario de Carvalho and José Riço Direitinho from the Portuguese. Elfenbein Verlag has published his poetry collection *Das Gesicht ablegen* (2001) and the Azores Trilogy: *Corvo* (2005), *Madre* (2007) and *Vulkanische Reise* (2008).

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Press Coverage of *Mr. Ives and the Fourth Removed*

“A panorama of repression and unconditional love of music.”

(Siegestsäule, Berlin, 03/2013)

“This book is the psychogram of an entire era. Glöckler has written his way into the souls of widely disparate people, and written from within them, and one who accomplishes such a feat can rightly be called a master. In moving language, not only elegant in style but stringent in form, now flowing tranquilly, now floating, he allows us to share in the inner conflicts of his protagonists, whom one quickly forgets to see as historical personalities – a remarkable novel!”

(Alban Nikolai Herbst, Volltext, 04/2012)

“Ralph Roger Glöckler has gleaned hundreds of details on the lives of the four protagonists: anecdotes, habits, predilections, fears. This extensive research is certainly one reason why Glöckler’s characters come to life in such phenomenal fashion, in all their complexity and with plenty of moral grey areas. The second reason is the language. Glöckler is not only a novelist and ethnologist, he is also a poet, and the language of his novel is honed with great deliberation. Each character has a voice of his or her own: Harmony is inspired by the descriptive, discursive epistolary style which women cultivated in the 19th century; Henry sounds melancholy; the sturdy Sidney quite straightforward. But most interesting of all is the style in which Charles Ives addresses his long-deceased father; it is inspired by his music. For instance, Glöckler has rendered the polyrhythm so typical of Ives into prose that flows, but constantly interrupts itself.

The sudden shifts in expression and instrumentation that mark Ives’ orchestral works are reflected in the unpredictable manner in which the fictitious Charles Ives jumps from one topic to another and back again in his letter. Glöckler even conveys Ives’ famous bitonality by intertwining dialogues. The four letters are the literary version of a musical suite.”

(Desirée Löffler, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Tonart, 2012)

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Mrs. Harmony T. Ives

We walked along the Housatonic River in Stockbridge, where we'd returned a month after our honeymoon to fulfil, amidst forested mountains, damp meadows, elms, the onward-flowing river, our wish to touch each other at last, to be touched, yes, taken, swept away, and later, silent, strolling along bridges and sandbanks, to ponder eddies and currents in the flowing water, for on our first honeymoon we'd only hiked, Charlotte, evading, through fatigue, our duty to suffice for this man, for this woman, can you understand that, we wanted to approach each other slowly, our love far too pure for a forcible, how shall I put it, profanation, even if...

In silence we crossed the meadows, mist billowed from them, blurred the outlines of the trees, rose up to the knoll, wrapped a filmy veil around the First Congregational Church, diffused up there in the rays of the sun and revealed the slender steeple. Charlie stopped in his tracks, clutched me by the arm, motioned me to heed the murmur of the water, soft rhythmic speech for him, I supposed, burbling riversong, the whisper of the wind in elms and willows, raised his head, attention focused on the ponderous flapping of ducks, their hoarse cries as they passed, we saw nothing, neither river nor birds, even the trees turned into shadows, heard only the voices of this morning, yes, a faint Mass commencing in the meadow mist, audible only to sympathetic ears. The mist dissolved in the sunlight, marooned us on the mead. We sank into the soft ground, wetting our feet, wanted to move on, but the church organ rang out, long introductory sequences, then the notes of the hymn, singers imploring us to hear Jesus' call in the rapids, the turbulent sea of life, to follow him wherever he might lead. What a sublime moment, Charlotte, what would I have given to share it with all the others, yes, didn't our love virtually demand it? Can you understand how Henry disgusts me, dirt in the mouth, muck on the body, love, I ask you, no, far from it, blasphemy, betrayal... Charlie held me tight, listening to the song as it fell into separate voices, forming anew with each new stanza only to gutter out in false notes, shrilly-dying chords, held me tight even

as the mist surged around us once more, shrouding church, trees, passing birds, only the water rushed in the distance, soft endless melody, streaming swirling around stones, Charlie held me tight, then, staring into the mist, staring at me, though I was unsure whom he saw, me, Charlotte, his young wife forgotten as it were in the meadows, no, he seemed to hearken staring into nothingness, at last he patted the pockets of his jacket, looking for something he couldn't find, regarded me with furrowed brow, suddenly seeming to grasp that I couldn't help him either, tugged me on straight across the meadow, shoes and feet wet, skirt hem stained green, I gazed at him astonished, appalled, yes, aggrieved, wanted to know the meaning of it, but he shook his head warningly, said nothing, signified with his look, as he alone could do, that I was to trust him and ask no questions, dragged me stumbling wordless to the bridge to quickly return to the village, our room, quickly, as I now know, so he could put down the notes for a first draft, a vague yet provocative idea, tugged me along behind him, then, snapped his fingers, gesticulated with his free hand, and sometimes, Charlotte, short sounds emerged from his throat...

1926, Charlotte, that means you won't remember. We didn't know each other yet. One of those muggy August days in New York when it's hard to breathe and you'd rather not leave the house. Charlie was working on a song, or whatever it was supposed to be, repeated sequences, altered them, stopped to think, finally played just one note at a time, falling like heavy drops down the stairwell and dissolving between the stories. Strange, never-before-heard music.

I sat in my room with the door ajar so that I could hear when he left his studio, called for me or came down the stairs mumbling sullenly. Worried, I set aside my knitting, hearkening to those ponderous, self-seeking notes that sounded as though I should go to him and ask what... then I heard him shut the piano lid. The strings reverberated, fell silent, and all was still. Charlie didn't move, didn't fume, which, as you know, he often did at the least provocation when disgruntled and angry, costing me an effort to soothe

him. No, all remained still. Then he rose, pushed away the piano bench, opened the softly creaking door, a revealing noise, Charlotte, for it had its own range of pitch, now higher, now lower, often deceptive, certainly, and yet it let me know what to expect from Charlie, and walked out of the studio into the stairwell. First the cane struck the stairs, then slow, heavy steps, a syncopated, never-before-heard rhythm I knew neither from pieces nor improvisations, after all he was capable of playing one rhythm with fingers and toes and singing another one, no, this sounded alien, as though it had fallen away from everything...

Charlie? I called, stepping out of the room.

Down the stairs came an old, pale, shrunken man. Face peaked, beard bristly. His hand made a hard, dragging sound on the banister, without sinews, muscles or skin, like nothing but bones. His shoulders stood out angular in the jacket, his trousers were much too loose. He raised his eyes, looked at me. He was weeping, Charlotte, said not a word, shook his head slowly and walked toward me.

That's all, he said, wrapped his arms around me, said that had been all, he could do no more, nothing sounded as it was supposed to, everything was out of tune, the strings torn.

I nestled my face to his cheek, stroked his head, kissed that grey, scratchy beard, tried to comfort him with words, cheer him up, remind him of crises he'd weathered, but he wouldn't let me finish.

No, he blurted. No. No. Did I recall that deep morning light flooding from the east, that invocation of eternal sunrise, that poem of his he'd been trying for days to set to music? It wasn't working, his music voiced only fear of a dull flood of light, of one more painful failure of a day, not only alarming him, but filling him with dread, and if he forced himself to invoke the fullness of the dawn, he would be composing against his better judgment, setting to music the stale song of decline, an old man's lament in which awakening, future, hope are nothing but assertions to which he, alas, gave the lie with his notes.

The end, he said softly, the music's end.

Charlie, I whispered in his ear, my poor little Charlie. My lamb. My child. No, he mustn't give up, he must be patient, he'd... rocked Charlie in my arms, who said no, no, Harmony, no, never again, heard once more the last notes shimmering like drops of ethereal oils in the stairwell. Then it was still.

We'd had tea and strolled down Park Street, and now we stood on the little bridge over the Housatonic River. We leaned on the railing, gazing down into the water that reflected the trees on the bank. It parted around boulders, swirled between stones, flowed in long hatched lines that drifted sideways, puckered, roughened skin, as though touched by an unexpected finger, flowed along, unquestioning and certain of itself. Birds sang, fluttered up, settled again on the massive roots that reached into the water. Charlie was silent, gazing into space. I nestled against him, leaning my head on his shoulder. The water below us was dark, though the lit by sun, which spread a warm, almost red sheen upon it, as though to hide the stony, muddy bed covered with rotting plants, yes, everything it carried with it, fish, crawfish, beavers, or, I asked myself, were they included in its secret, something that did not concern me, anyone, or, I asked myself, looking at Charlie, remote from me, lost in thought, I placed my hand on his arm, but he didn't respond, left me alone with my questions, water on which rapid, immediately obliterated scripts formed, dissolving slanted sentences, beautiful as hieroglyphs, alien and wild and never seen before, missives I didn't understand...

Charlie, I said, pressing against him, suddenly afraid of the water coursing darkly below us, that unsettling force turned flood which wanted to tell me something, no, not only that, which threatened me at this moment with the runes scratched fleetingly in its skin, Charlie, I repeated, what are you thinking about?

I'm not thinking about anything, he said without looking at me. Why?

I don't know, I said after a time, shrugging my shoulders, suddenly feeling remote from everything, even from Charlie, who had been so close to me just now, as though he were in league with these hidden forces, with

this unutterable knowledge dissolved in water, yes, as though he knew more about the fear that had seized me, without wanting to relieve me of it. Then he smiled.

Leaves floated past, the first withered harbingers of fall, spun about as though glad to be drifting out to the sea, into the open, into nothingness, wind rustled in the trees, making more rain down, glide to the water which wound through the woods like a scaly snake... then the trees stood bare on the bank, snow began to fall, shrouding us, Charlie, me, the bridge, ice spread across the river, cracked open, creaking, ice floes broke away, crashed together, drifted drunkenly away. Ice-sheathed willow branches hung into the water, glittering red in the winter sun, clashing gently, softly fading sounds of memory, like God plucking a frozen harp.

Harmony, asked Charles, looking at me. Should we go? You look tired.

No, I didn't want to know what the river hides. It turns life over, churning to the top what is bottommost, heaving its masses somewhere I don't want to be, not yet, yes, I admit it, I'm afraid of its muddy currents. Charlie seemed to surrender himself to them in his mind, even if he claimed the opposite. I didn't like that, it made him a stranger to me. He hummed absently, reaching his hand into the air as though to catch something. Would he set these unutterable moments to music, I asked without looking at him, softly flowing rivers, hymns ringing out in the mist, the winter clink of icy pendants, yes, was it not necessary to capture in notes what had been revealed to us, love, Charles, love which knows neither dark secrets nor muddy outlets into nothingness, our love, making it music, song, to proclaim itself to all...

(pp. 53-59)

Mr. Henry D. Cowell

The Black Hawk sedan was a big car, I'd bought it used years before. A bit battered, but that was all I could afford to drive. The steering wheel jittered on the washed-out roads in Yosemite Park, making me feel the unavoidable potholes. The kids, Werner, his brother James, Steve, Herman, pubescent boys with squawking voices who saw me as a big brother or uncle, and the two older youths, one seventeen, beefy, blond, with a rough, condescending face, the other sixteen, wiry, taciturn, with short black hair, gazed out silently. The blond one had calloused fists, the other had eyes that didn't miss a thing. Both, like me, were fatherless boys. As you know, I often invited them on drives, spending an outdoor weekend with them, in the mountains, on the beach, somewhere in the forest, shared fun, no, almost a ritual, something they didn't need to talk me into, I could hardly wait to be on the road with them and, who knows, make up for lost time. The past few months they'd made this demand a bit too often, though, and I gave in with mixed feelings, sometimes ruefully, as though I were no longer making the decisions myself. A violent jolt shook the car, the boys grumbled, criticized my driving, admonished me not to jeopardize this marvelous vehicle where they sat wedged between blankets, tents, badminton rackets. Then, tin cans, packaged bread, hot dogs spilling from the baskets, I put on the brakes, stopped abruptly.

What's the big idea, Henry, yelled Werner.

Nothing, replied one of the older boys, can't he do as he likes?

Silent, I gazed at the stark cliffs mounting endlessly into the sky at the mouth of the valley, contemplated the long hatched lines lit by the sun, glimmering yellow at first through the dusty insect-studded windshield, then darker-seeming, reddish brushwork on the rock. There the waterfall's veil drifted in the wind, glowing in the colors of the coming sunset: yellow, red, purple, flashes of swiftly fading light, the evening's scintillating flag.

Just look at that, I said at last, without taking my hands from the steering wheel.

We're looking, said James, but it's getting dark, and we've got to pitch our tents somewhere. Keep driving, Henry.

I rolled down the window. Cool air flooded the car, heralding a cold, clear night in which the stars could be counted, if only they didn't flicker so, confounding the senses.

Henry, said the black-haired boy whose name I don't recall, be a pal, will you! Don't we deserve to get there at last? Such a hard drive. Just yesterday we polished the chrome, washed the car, brushed the upholstery.

What do you mean, we? said Steve. James and I did that. All by ourselves.

Me too, Herman interrupted. So there.

Don't argue, I said, and started the car, because we really couldn't stay on the road too late, and it would be some time before we reached our destination.

Seems to me you're ungrateful, said the blond boy whose name escapes me. We're hungry and we want a rest. These mountains are full of rugged cliffs and waterfalls.

We've been working hard, said Herbert, we were happy to do it: dig the swimming pool behind the house, help out the cement man. What a grind. But we'd do anything for you, Henry. After all, we get something out of it too.

Yeah, yeah, said the black-haired boy. Of course.

You go swimming there as well, said Steve, like all the boys in the neighborhood.

And he could take us to the movies more often too, said the blond boy.

We'd arrived, we got out of the car, leaving the doors open. Even the boys were silent, marveling at the crannied red bosom of the cliff, water plunging over its rim with a roar, splashing the mountain, whirling away in the wind further up, sending out sparks, showering down a glittering rain. The pines gave off a pungent smell, the ground exhaled vapors. The creek water whispered. Suddenly afraid, feeling threatened, I glanced around tensely: the Black Hawk, doors flung open, in the mountains' shadow, blankets, tarps, rackets tumbling out, a black, rejected wreck, a fallen bird. No, I

never should have come here, I should have stayed home. Cold air seized me, made me shiver. The boys were talking among themselves, but I couldn't hear what about. Then we pitched the tents.

I'd just stepped into the house, looking out the back door into the garden. The water of the pool was agitated, gleaming in the sun as though someone were swimming. That was all I could see. I stood where I was, listening, but all was silent. Gradually I took in the few pieces of furniture looming silhouetted in the room, the piano, the stool, the scattered sheets of notes on the table, just as I had left it a few hours ago to give a lesson in Berkeley. I put down my bag, walked on softly to see which of the boys was in the garden and whether, warned by the growl of the car, they would hide from me. Then I stepped outside and saw no one, the leaves of the bamboo hedge flickering in the sun, asked out loud who was hiding... and found them in the shed by the house: immersed naked in the exploration of their bodies, not with their hands alone, no, how to describe it without offending your sensibilities, with every pore, in wordless rapture, silent, Charlie, as in old, grainy films, black and white cinema. I stopped, didn't move, could hardly tear myself away, wanted to turn, withdraw, it would be better not to give in, not to let this sight ensnare me, not after Elsa's departure, not any more, not again, retreated slowly step by step, they hadn't noticed me, obsessed as they were, and went silently back inside. There I leaned against a wall, closed my eyes, tried to switch off the silent flickering film, but the scenes forced their way out of me, overlaid the furniture, the piano, the notes on the table. I was helpless, I struggled for air, I'd been holding my breath. I had never seen such scenes before save in my delirious dreams, and now, Charlie, they'd become reality, surging up from within me, turning physical, firm, taking form in my hand, which, I had no choice, I used to stoke them still further, escalate them, bring them to a head, until they exploded in images of excess, overflowing my fingers. Then I dropped my hand. Overwhelmed. Content. Beaten. I didn't know how. I didn't like it. Edna? Elsa? No, this was how I had wanted it.

The door stood ajar, light fell straight across the room, a slanting, elongated rectangle. I stepped inside. Werner, James, Steve and Herman were waiting for me, jumped up, all started talking at once, that that blond Malin had said, no, he'd been telling stories everywhere, stories my eye, he'd broadcasted it, yes, with that condescending, know-it-all expression, vile, every freckle on that nose, what gave him the idea to make up a thing like that, what, I asked, not knowing who I should listen to, what I should think, to make it up, or if it wasn't made up, to blab it around, to puff himself up, to get, they just knew it, his revenge, what then, dammit, I said sharply, dropping the heavy bag filled with sheet music samples, composition exercises, harmonics, the musician's tools, don't all talk at once, you, Werner, now: what happened that night up in the mountains, because, well, that was wrong, criminal, it had to be punished, what, I gasp, James, if Werner can't manage to spit it out, it's your turn, now: because I'd assaulted him, I knew what that meant, and he'd told his guardian, the sister he lived with, and reported it to the DA, wait, I said, blood rising to my face, tried to control myself, not hold my breath, so Malin reported me, because, Steve blurted out, because, Herman interrupted, because he doesn't have any parents, he lives with his sister, he's a minor, dependent, and, said, Werner, he's bragging that he's going to get even with you, oh, Henry, he went on beseechingly, they're after you, they want to arrest you, lock you up, they'll be coming for you, rubbish, James interjected, not that fast, and anyway, no one knows if it's true, what Marlin's broadcasting around, he's coarse, crude, envious, he wants to get respect, that's all, yeah, says Herman, after all we're the ones who dug the swimming pool, took care of the house and washed the car, that's just it, Herman interrupts, Malin and the other guy don't belong, no, they foisted themselves on us, hangers-on, trying to use us, badmouth us, what, I think suddenly, if what the boys say is true, he's made good on his threats, yes, I know why, to denounce me, report me, in a word: to finish me off, acting like big shots and, Werner fumes, they're not even from these parts...

The tents were small, sleeping three apiece. The four boys had retired, crawl-

ing into their sleeping bags. I heard them giggling, teeth chattering, because it was even damper and colder than we had expected. I stood outside a bit longer, staring at the last glow of the fire before going to lie down between the two oldest boys. I was afraid. I don't know why. Then I gazed into the starry sky that gaped above the black cliffs. The stars seemed to speak with one another, invisible yet perceptible signals like communicating lights in a web that wove its way through the universe, that I could climb, vanishing in the distance.

Then I felt the cold, felt it reaching for my calves, my thighs. The waterfall thundered down the steep rock faces, drifting damply over me when the wind turned and blew snatches light as breath into my face. Suddenly all was still. Firs and oaks stood black, motionless, only the dying embers winked between the charred stumps of the campfire. I'd go inside the tent now, slip into my sleeping bag and try not to freeze. Yes, I was afraid, I knew why, knew we'd better stop taking these drives, because I, because the boys, because... this wasn't a game, but an alibi for something else, something monstrous that I couldn't put a name to, I was afraid, I knew why, knew I'd have to change this, yes, if I was still able to...

My sleeping bag was cold, my clothes clammy. Shivering in the fluffy material, I listened to the breathing of these two young men who, to be honest, filled me with unease, but also with the desire to feel them against me, naked, to warm myself in the heat of their bodies, to free myself from this tension, this fear, this catastrophe lurking among the mountains, into which I, we, were about to plunge headlong, oh, if only one of them would put his arm around me, whisper soothing words in my ear, restore my confidence, make me understand that... I stared into space, heard my heart beat, slower than usual, separate, violent throbs which I felt were about to cease, make me step out from my body and leave me dead in the cold of the night.

Is something wrong? asked the blond boy.

I'm cold, I replied. You too? Should I get some more blankets from the car?

No reply, just a dull, distant tremor. Endless. I no longer knew whether

I was awake, or had slipped away into a realm of icy shadows. Then the blond boy turned around, extricated himself, slipped beside me, dragged his opened sleeping bag over us, clutched me, pressed himself against me, sought my mouth, as he had never done before, sought, Charles, forgive me this openness, forgive me, this flood of feeling is liberating, the sense of becoming a living human being again, even if, as they said at the time, it was sick, perverse, couldn't be, never again, and I heard the rumble of stone breaking loose, yes, avalanches roaring down, burying me, it was not just my mouth he sought, but my whole body, and drank then, flushed, thirsty, water from my cup.

Then we let each other go. I thought nothing any longer, lay there with eyes closed. The blond boy breathed evenly, must have fallen asleep. The black-haired boy hadn't moved, silent, as though he'd been sleeping the entire time.

That Black Hawk, he said after a while, is a nice car.

I turned my head toward him, but he didn't move, lying there as though he'd spoken in his sleep. Had I really heard words, or only hallucinated them? I said nothing, waiting to see if I'd hear any more.

Did you hear, Henry? asked the blond.

Yes, I said. Why?

You should give us that car, said the black-haired boy without turning toward me.

That would just be natural, wouldn't it? the blond went on after a little while. And after what you just let yourself do, you can be glad if that present gets you off the hook.

I sat up, searched for the flashlight, shone it into the two boys' faces. They kept their eyes shut, poker-faced.

Idiots, I said. If you want a car like that, you'll have to earn it yourselves. Make an effort.

No, Henry, the blond said without opening his eyes. It's not that simple. Sometimes a situation can change all of a sudden.

Especially, said the black-haired boy, if the DA finds out about it.

I lay down again, staring at the bright circle the flashlight cast on the tent

wall. Idiots, I thought, things like that are no joking matter. Really now, that just can't be. Or was I just dreaming? Yes, it was time to put an end to these drives. That was the proof. Idiots. It was all clear as day now. I even felt relieved. Then, no longer knowing what to think, I switched off the flashlight, shook my head and laughed in the darkness.

(pp. 115-122)

Mr. Charles E. Ives

After sunset: grey expiring sky, the black curved silhouette of the peaks around Elk Lake, straight, silver, white-gleaming streaks on the dark lake, look, Harmony, there, just one left between the hills and the water, and now, extinguished, dark-varnished masses shifting before the eyes, with a dull but perceptible sheen beneath solitary, look, more and more, hundreds of glimmering stars, yes, she says, as though painted by our masters, Frederic Edwin Church, or, I finish her thought, his pupil Martin Johnson Heade. We're sitting on the jetty outside the camp lodge where we're spending a month, September 1911, despite daytime summer warmth one feels the evening cool which soon, suddenly, will turn to snow and surrender the Adirondacks to the natives or adventurous outsiders. Harmony, grown thin over the past year, buttons up her cardigan. I unfold the light blanket that hangs over the armrests of our chairs, feeling the damp, smelling the water that laps softly beneath the planks. Swathes of mist drift over from the far shore, barely perceptible wisps floating before the night-lacquered hills. Harmony takes my hand, gazing lost in thought across the lake, silent, she's changed altogether these past months, withdrawn, but I don't ask, observing her, waiting to see if she'll open up and speak to me or if this shadow will pass on its own. Loons burst out laughing, but we can't see them, only hearing wing-beats over the water, a soft swoosh. Then it's still. Even the wind is silent in the trees. We each pursue our thoughts. To contemplate the mountains is to grasp the spiritual force invoked by Emerson and resistant to words, for they metamorphose from what we perceive with our senses into something different, abstract: what, I ask myself, is their origin, in what direction will they develop, all being points beyond itself, was as it never was before, becomes what it no longer is, no longer material, but an emanation of the all-creating spirit that forms the world from within to without, that is, within ourselves... To be, I say softly, pausing, striking words in my mind like notes on the piano, as never before, to become what no longer is, do you hear, Harmony, whence, whither, be as never before, become what no longer is, everything points beyond itself, paradoxically radiant sequences

played slowly with the right hand, darker variations on that assertion with the left hand, then played with all ten fingers... groping for my notebook to jot down the idea before I forget it, but I can't find it, fold back the blanket, jump up, whence, whither, I blurt out, can you hear it, to be as never before, to become what no longer is, everything, the phrase's sounds scatter in single racing notes, everything, I go on, points beyond itself, listen, Harmony, how the notes fade, but then, slowly, deliberately, yes, quoting myself, everything points beyond itself and, backwards, beyond itself it points, ending, whence, whither, with Beethoven's chords, like God's fist pounding a cosmic gong... Harmony? Without looking at me she nods indulgently, no, wearily, leans back, turns her head away, must have expected something other than this sketch for "my" Emerson, for what, if I'm not mistaken, is a piece that will endlessly metamorphose, never find completion, turns her head away, showing me the delicate hairs at her nape. Harmony, I ask, what's wrong? But she merely shrugs her shoulders, oh nothing, I shouldn't mind her, she's tired, very tired... I grasp her hand, lying bony on the armrest, forgetting that I wanted to go to my room and jot down the idea, because what I don't write down disappears or begins to circle my memory in cynically clanging fragments that refuse to fit together, why, she goes on softly, don't I be quiet for a bit... slowly her hand warms in mine, she turns her head, gives me a quick glance, as though she feels better, then gazes out at the lake, lost in thought. She's been pale ever since we lost the baby, hard put to recover. I'm worried about her. Mist creeps closer, tattered pillows whose cool, dissolving down floats over the water, touching our faces. Art, too, points beyond stone, bronze, words, I say softly, toward what the material which forms it never can be: comes to life in spirit, hinting at the nameless, just as, Harmony, the notes I write voice those laws you can sense but not understand. Someone like Emerson, I go on after a while, never gives up, searching, climbing the highest summits in his thoughts.

Harmony withdraws her hand, gasps for breath as though to speak, but doesn't look at me, sheer resistance. I sense that I'm annoying her, realize I'd better hold my tongue, spare her my effusions, but I ask softly, to soothe her

with my love, if Emerson didn't write that God reveals himself in the body of the woman you love, pointing beyond it to perfection?

Woman, she gasps, burying her face in her hands, woman, breaking out in agonized laughter... woman, she gasps, writhing on her chair, bowing her upper body as though convulsed in pain. I kneel swiftly before her, not knowing what to do or say, darling, please, for Heaven's sake, I grasp her hands, she withdraws them at once, I meant well, didn't mean to hurt her, on the contrary, what... Woman, she asks sarcastically, she, whose body, after the miscarriage, has been a crypt, a grave, an excavated pit, yes, she felt soil being shoveled from her body, day and night, woman, never to bear again, who made our marriage, our love sterile, dead, ashes, woman, merely stuck in a feminine-looking body, feeling nothing now but sincere love, hadn't I noticed it, yes, of course, who wouldn't notice, woman, however dreadful, ignoble, reprehensible, indeed impious it might sound, feeling herself to be a parched field, karstified ground which neither dew nor rain could waken, woman, Charles, no, she gasps, never again... in her dreams forced to live through the pangs of much too early labor, every night, barely able to stand, reaching for a chair, calling for her crippled sister Sally, not crippled, no, Charles, envious, jealous, malicious, standing in the door, feasting her eyes on the sight, Sally, she cries, a doctor, at once, but she doesn't move, not until she swoons to the ground does her sister go out to get help, every night, lapsing into delirium, dragging herself in bloody clothes down the hospital corridors, turned away at all the wards, yes, they slam the doors in front of her, bar them with lock and key as though to fend off a plague, and yet she must keep alive our legacy, the longed-for child, every night, woken, as she woke back then in the hospital bed, by the hum of the fan in her ears, that stubborn, cynical, mocking drone always reminding her that she has lost her child, herself, hope, yes, everything, as though this whirl announced she was neither woman nor man, but a wilful misrepresentation: at that Harmony leaps up, stares at me distraught, presses her hands to her ears, every night, Charles, every night... then she sinks back in her chair, hugs herself, trembles as though charged with electricity, gazes at me with wide-open eyes, acquiescing to everything, even my censure, but I lay my

head on her lap, kiss her thighs, her stomach, her hands, here, where all can hear and see us, oh, let them hear and see and think what they will, but the mist drifts in from the lake, enveloping us, we who've never spoken of the lost child, of this affliction, why, I don't know what reason it could have but our cowardice, our how shall I call it, nothing justifies this silence... forgive me, Harmony, I say into her lap, forgive me, painfully aware that it's not enough just to write a song, even if it traces the fall of the mortally wounded bird, how it shatters upon the field, transforming our pain into melody, I know, but... she buries her hand in my hair, lets it lie there, as though she no longer knew what to say, letting me feel her pain, this, how could she endure it, creeping annihilation... why did I never ask about her sadness, I saw how pale, sunken, downcast, in a word, how sick she was, how could I neglect her so, have you, father, has the agency, the work on my music made me blind, console me, did I, I ask myself, and hold my breath, hardly daring to think it, did I not even miss her lap, her femininity... as a woman, says Harmony slowly, she is dead to me... I help her to her feet, take her in my arms, press my face against her cheek, no, darling, I say, for Heaven's sake, and realize that at this moment we are awakening to something new, our love transforming after all, no, darling, no, I say, I who want no woman who fulfils what men expect of her, but rather one like her, I put my arm around her shoulders, lead her slowly back to the house, for the mist shrouds hills and lake, lapping heavily over the shore, and it will be good to crawl back in our den, go to bed, hold each other close...

I light the candelabrum. White candles, white light tinged brown, a wood-warm mood in our room. The unhewn logs of the cabin exude a gentle, soothing fragrance, a refuge wrested from mountains and woods. Clothes hang on the hooks, shoes stand lined against the walls. I fold back the plaid bedspread and make the beds ready. Harmony sits in the wicker chair by the little book-laden table, her hands on her lap, staring at the black window-panes touched by the glimmer of the candles. Then she gazes downward, brittle-seeming, pale, with deep-set eyes. I slip the shoes from her feet, unbutton her cardigan, help her remove it, undress her, lay her blouse, skirt,

stockings, lay her underclothes on the other chair, let her put on her nightgown. She smiles at me wearily, thank you, she says softly, thank you, that's enough now, actually smiles in relief, as though I'd shoveled soil away from her, gets up to wash her face and hands and go to bed. Then she snuggles up to me under the covers, laying her head on my shoulder. How cold she is! But after a while my body's warmth embraces her, and I feel her relax bit by bit. We leave one candle burning on the windowsill, to sense this tiny light in the room, glimmering in the pane, as though some other life were glowing there, discovered down there by the lake, a life of which we cannot yet clearly conceive, unnamed being still, which we must allow to germinate in this tiny room built of ancient trees, yes, in our hearts, frail, indistinct, yet unmistakable against the dense fog swallowing the hills, lake and house. Shall we take in a child, I ask softly, one of those abandoned creatures, and make it our own, we, mother and father, who have known passion and love, energies that metamorphose from desire and rapture into something sublime, radiating out onto others... Harmony presses her face to my cheek, lays her arm across my chest, but I don't know whether she hears what I'm saying, I hesitate to go on, hold my breath, watch for the flickering, poised candlelight, for the unspoken tenderness we're capable of, no, not like brother and sister, but in broader circles described by our love, to radiate, then, what we experienced, in order to transcend it, and yet I ask myself if I don't after all miss physical desire? The question has no answer, leaving me in a strangely hued silence with nothing but my love of Harmony and my desire to kindle notes from it... Did I see him, asked Harmony. Who, I ask, but she says nothing, breathing calmly at my breast, who, darling, him, she replies, the old man with the aquiline nose and the eagle's eyes, didn't I see him, she asks, climbing the mountain across the lake, step by step, stopping to search the starry sky, his hand shading his eyes? Yes, I replied, now I see him too. He takes a telescope from his coat pocket, attempts to gaze into the depths of the universe, but he can't see enough, he must climb higher. Scree, says my wife, crunches beneath his boots, makes him slip, but he catches himself, climbs higher and higher, yes, I go on, he's already gained the summit, unbuttons coat and shirt, takes his hat from his head, not only to pay

God proper homage but, Harmony goes on, to ask for admittance, there, I say, he's raising his hands to knock, but, she goes on sleepily, eternity is open for Emerson. Then she falls asleep. Her warm breath against my neck. I don't move. I hold still. The burning candle by the window, the little flame, poised, then flickering again. I lie awake. Relieved. Sad. One thing and the other. Neither nor. I think. Can't stop thinking. Will I be able to sleep?

(pp. 187-193)

Mrs. Sidney R. Cowell

I have time, Harmony, time to do nothing, not much money, only the few dollars a friend slipped me and the measly fee for odd bibliographic jobs, dire straits, in other words, housesitting for friends on trips, taking care of children, what could stop me, then, from picking up Henry in White Plains, where following his release on parole he's found work as Percy Grainger's personal secretary, looking after his music library, a paid job, lodging, someone to take responsibility for him, that was the only way to get him released, what, then, could stop me from picking up Henry on occasion and, if the authorities allow it, driving him to New York or Washington, a pleasant change for a woman used to traveling alone, making music recordings in the mountains, in the woods, in remote regions. I glance at the rearview mirror, see my eyes, my brown hair combed back from my forehead, in front of the house vanishing in the background, 7 Cromwell Place, glimpse, before focusing on the traffic, the image of a woman fighting a losing but not entirely hopeless battle, sense Henry's small, sparsely-haired hand on the seat next to me, like a new challenge waiting there, shouldn't I lay my hand down near his, casually, just like that, next to those short, note-writing piano fingers which, if they like, can feel their way toward me, a seemingly chance experimental set-up for a man who, as he says, prefers his own kind, but is forced to transcend boundaries so that, yes, of course, he can find himself... We turn onto the highway, leaving White Plains behind us. Henry lays his head on the backrest, staring at the ceiling, lulled by the monotonous noise of the motor, until his eyes fall shut. Am I mistaken? Hasn't he moved closer to me? Yes, he has, his hand's resting nearer to mine. His nails are neither manicured nor clean, musician's paws, but I like that, fingers that sink in, seize things, the claws of a worker, compelled to poach where art grows wild, good thing there's not much traffic, or I'd ram the curb, go into a tailspin, cause a pile-up, for Henry's fingertips imprint my soul. I'm not in love with this man, and I don't know why I'd waste a single thought on a relationship with him, and yet he perturbs me, challenges me, means something to me that I don't understand. I keep staring at this hand, which now lies up-

turned, open beside me on the seat, trying to read these crazy lines overlaid by light and shadows, but I need to keep my eye on the traffic, yes, pass that truck before I take my right hand from the steering wheel and bury it in Henry's hand. He says nothing, doesn't stir, I'm about to withdraw my hand as though I'd been carried away to an unseemly action, but then he closes his fingers and holds it tight. We're silent. It's a difficult feeling, Harmony, that comes over me! I'd like to stroke his skin, trace the lines of his hand, rub my fingertips on his to deduce from them the man's body and soul, his sensuality, his arousability, his readiness to open himself to this groping adventure, give himself up, become intimate, he told me after all that spider bites have made his skin numb, unfeeling, as though dead, yes, I see the gnarled pine beneath which Henry spreads the blanket, exhausted from the long drive to California, wanting to rest, sleep, so that he'll reach his destination, Jaime de Ângulo's mountain home, in one piece, just barely seeing the crooked branches against the sun setting in the Pacific before they melt into the sky and dissolve: then the black widow bites, hard, fierce, Henry jumps up, clutching his stinging hand, feels the spider crawl up his chest to his shoulder and drop, vanishing somewhere between the stones, gone as though never seen, and Henry must flee to the nearest hospital, no, I don't touch his skin, neither his fingertips nor the lines of the hand, I don't try to learn how this man would react to a touch, cautiously I let him hold my hand... the man I just left, Harmony, was completely different, drawing me in with funny stories you'd find risqué, which he and other researchers had collected in the mountains, variations of human experience that call for discussion, not prejudice, for much in them is neither decorous nor morally justifiable, and so I'll spare you the swear words and the salty sayings, drew me in, then, with the story of a man who cheated on his wife and caught an embarrassing disease. Gonorrhea. You know. At that he gave me a roguish look, eyebrows raised, the broad, sensual mouth curled in laughter. Light fell through the window of the office of the Washington folk music archive, casting our shadows on the wall with the empty shelves which would gradually fill with our recordings of fiddle music, songs, tales, two silhouettes growing toward each other and halting halfway, as though two who had long desired each

other could not yet come together: how I would have loved to stroke his curly hair, his cheeks, removed his glasses to kiss him on those shining boyish eyes, eyes that gazed at me long and pensively when we worked together and lowered, startled, the moment I glanced up to look at him... So, he tries to hide the clap from his wife, my friend goes on, but after a few days he's forced to explain his lack of marital appetite to his grumbling spouse. Up he jumps out of bed one night, screaming with pain, claiming he'd been bitten by a tarantula. Just look at this state of affairs, his masculinity swollen, red, why, practically afire, all her fault, he claims in convincing rage, neglecting her duties, she'd forgotten to wash the sheets. His wife, I go on, admits it, filled with contrition, we know how women react, don't we, bursting into tears and running straight for the doctor, who, once summoned, grasps the situation and, poker-faced, prescribes abstinence until... and he seizes my hand, my arm, draws me toward him, near, quite near, I feel his lips on my cheeks, my mouth, until he's cured, my friend blurts between kisses, and fit again, all the things you can do with spiders, I say softly between two breaths, and surrender myself to his lips again, his gentle, self-confident tongue, but then the door flies open, and we leap apart, startled... Leo Lindner. I think that was his name, Henry's first love affair. No idea what he looked like, Harmony, let's picture him slender, with a narrow face, high forehead, hair parted in the middle, yes, let's say he had a tendency to pallor, which, in the heat of his violin playing, would suffuse with color, turn pink and scarlet, a dainty porcelain figurine, a violin-playing ephebe, no, Harmony, don't say a thing, just let your thoughts wander, filling people with a touch of obscenity, an iridescent glamor they'd never have otherwise, indulge yourself before it's too late... Henry, with whom he's playing, takes his hands from the keyboard, and Leo sets down the violin. They let the last notes of the duet fade away, one Henry wrote for them, a wild, mad, polyrhythmic piece that flouts the audience's taste and its listening habits, you know, Harmony, something Charles could have composed, though I have to admit that his would have sounded better, so they let the last notes fade away. Dissonant cries ring out, howls of rage, pea whistles, cheers, floodlights blaze at the artists from the sides, making the shadow of the open piano lid loom across

the stage like a demon wing. Leo turns around, hisses at Henry that he'd calculated this effect, put down to him alone, his hysterical thrashing at the keys, not both of them, who'd lain in each other's arms just yesterday, here, in Leipzig, in that awful, creaking hotel bed, no, he says harshly, all he needs him for, Leo, is this wretched show, this ruthless self-dramatization, enough, he's had enough, hurls the violin to the stage, kicks at the instrument, beside himself, it falls into the stalls with a resonant crash, he gives Henry a shove and leaves the scene of the uproar. At a loss, Henry hears cries of rage, cheers, seats are already being torn from their mountings, there's going to be a brawl, but then gendarmes appear and try to restore order. Henry leaves the stage, goes looking for Leo, who cowers sobbing, half-undressed, on a chair in the dressing room, Leo, he says, you can't imagine what's going on out there, come on, it's not about you or me, it's about music and what it has to do differently in future, don't cry, stop, I can't stand that, sex is sex, that's all, spare us these silly emotions, either come or go, and when you do, do it once and for all. Don't shake your head, Harmony, don't ward off the thought, that's how it could have been. Do you hear that? They're calling for the artists, encore, uproar, musical hell, cheering, clapping, stamping, a chorus of ecstatic pea whistles, yes, they've gone wild. Henry steps back onstage. Behind the scenes they're sweeping up shards, but no one hears... No, I'm not mistaken. Henry's moved closer. Holding the steering wheel with both hands, I try again to pass a truck, but then slow down, suddenly unsure of myself on this road which I envision extending all the way to the bridges of Manhattan, as though we were approaching a place in which expectations are neither fulfilled, nor do they vanish. What will we find there? Suddenly I don't know what we've gotten into, no idea, everything is completely uncertain. The asphalt shimmers in the sun, glowing, at the melting point. I hold my breath. The car floats, not responding to the movements of the steering wheel, though I'm steering with both hands because Henry has laid his head on my shoulder, just like that, a mute, trusting gesture. My face burns, sweat beads on my brow. Was that what I wanted? Don't know, don't dare to ask. Don't want any answers. Henry doesn't move, seems to be asleep. I begin to breathe shallowly, driving as though through an untitled film,

everything suddenly a backdrop: the skyscrapers, the highway, the car in which we're sitting, even the road noise seems recorded. All that's missing is a dialogue for us to recite. Then the lighting grows gentler, reddish, fading studio light. Will it be much longer, Henry asks sleepily, not opening his eyes. No, I say, no, but I no longer know where we are.

(pp. 239–244)