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# Elegy for Cello and Piano

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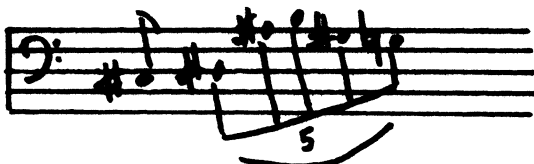
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## Elegy for Cello and Piano · *Donald Justice*

The Bestor papers have come down to me.  
I would imagine, though, they're destined for  
The quiet archival twilight of some library.  
Meanwhile, I have been sorting through the scores.  
The one I linger over is the last,  
The 'Elegy.' I seem to see the notes  
Flying above the staff like flags of mourning;  
And I can hear the sounds the notes intend.  
(Some duo of the mind produces them,  
Without error, ghost-music materializing;  
Faintly, of course, like whispers overheard.)  
And then? I might work up the piano part,  
Not that it matters. Where is there a cellist  
This side of the causeway? And who plays Bestor now?

This time of day I listen to the surf  
Myself; I listen to it from my terrace.  
The sun eases its way down through the palms,  
Scattering colors—a bit of orange, some blues.  
Do you know that painting of Bonnard's, *The Terrace*?  
It shows a water pitcher blossom-ready  
And a woman who bends down to the doomed blossoms—  
One of the fates, in orange—and then the sea  
With its own streaks of orange, harmonious.  
It used to hang in the Phillips near the Steinway.  
Can anyone call back now the web of sound  
The piano and the cello wove together  
In the same Phillips not too long ago?  
The three plucked final chords—someone might still  
Recall, if not the chords, then the effect  
They made—as if the air were troubled somehow.  
As if . . . but everything there is is that.  
The cello had one phrase, an early phrase,  
That does stay with me. (It may be mixed by now  
With Bonnard's colors.) A brief rush upward, then

A brief subsiding. Can it be abstract?—  
As Stravinsky said it must be to be music.  
But what if a phrase *could* represent a thought—  
Or feeling, should I say?—without existence  
Apart from the score where someone catches it:



Inhale, exhale: a drawn-out gasp or sigh.  
Falling asleep, I hear it. It is just there.  
I don't say what it means. And I agree  
It's sentimental to suppose my friend  
Survives in just this fragment, this tone-row  
A hundred people halfway heard one Sunday  
And one of them no more than half remembers.  
The hard early years of study, those still,  
Sequestered mornings in the studio,  
The perfect ear, the technique, the great gift  
All have come down to this one ghostly phrase.  
And soon nobody will recall the sound  
These six notes made once or that there were six.

Hear the gulls. That's our local music.  
I like it myself; and, as you can see,  
Our sunset-maker studied with Bonnard.