

Pablo Casals' Hands

by Valerie Polichar

Pablo Casals' hands  
on the cello didn't pull me then; for years  
the image remained in mind  
but superimposed with the eventual blur  
of other hands, Billie Holiday in her Sunday best, a clock.  
A portrait of him as a young man  
bears an expression both uncertain and assured.  
His hand here rests almost casually  
on the neck of the instrument.  
Older, post-retirement pictures show a weathered grip  
wielding the cello as if it had the power  
to stave off rain, the Franco regime, or death.  
Memory overlays the fingers one upon the other,  
the expression of the skin at last as  
at odds with itself as Casals' face in 1921.  
Still they were an anchor-point,  
alone in a strange city with nothing to bear  
and everything to leave,  
blurred, recognized dimly on a cafe wall,  
Suite in G Major, a cappuccino, you hold it to yourself,  
the swell of night noises,  
twelve hundred miles from home.

— 3<sup>rd</sup> Muse