

Sunset Harvest



2. Retreat

April 14, 2022

Retreat

OUR CLASS TODAY will be about artists who, in later life, turned their backs on the world around them to retreat to a more distant time. This need not be taken in a negative sense. Turner turned to mythology to provide images he could no longer go out to paint from nature; Grandma Moses painted the world in which she grew up as a child; Picasso reinterpreted the work of earlier artists as a way to recharge his own creative energies. In *The Tempest* and other late plays, Shakespeare was seeking a synthesis of all his previous concerns. After living through the Blitz in London, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) returned to her classical roots to write a feminist epic about Helen of Troy that bypasses the Trojan War entirely. Richard Strauss returned to the time of Mozart to explore the nature of opera itself. And Sicilian prince Giuseppe di Lampedusa goes back to the mid-19th century and the *Risorgimento* to understand the decline of his own family and caste. *rb.*

A. The Distant Image

Some late works by three very different painters, **Turner**, **Picasso**, and **Grandma Moses**, each of whom returned to images from the past, though for quite different reasons.

Turner: *Scenes from the Aeneid* (1850, Tate)

Grandma Moses: *Sugaring Off* (1955)

Grandma Moses: *Morning on the Farm* (1951)

Picasso: *Musketeer with Pipe* (3 versions, 1969/70)

Hals: *The Laughing Cavalier* (1624, London, Wallace Collection)

♪ **Simon Shaw:** *The Last Great Paintings by Picasso* (Sotheby's)

B. I'll Drown My Book

Shakespeare was not yet fifty when he wrote *The Tempest*, his farewell to the stage. Yet all his last few plays show *LateStyle* fingerprints—formal experiment, a broader conception of time, and a striving for reconciliation and synthesis. In this one, moreover, he goes back to classical mythology and the old device of the *masque* to celebrate the union of the young lovers and promise of new life.

- ♪ **Shakespeare:** *The Tempest* 5/1, Prospero (Simon Russell Beale)
- ♪ **Shakespeare:** *The Tempest* 4/1 (RSC 2016, d.Greg Doran)

C. The Absent Helen

The American modernist poet **H. D.** (Hilda Doolittle, 1886–1961), sailed to England in 1911, and remained in the Old World for the rest of her life. She was thus living in London during both World Wars. I chose her for this class because it struck me forcibly that this woman in her later sixties should have responded to the Blitz by writing a book-length poem about the Trojan War from a feminist perspective, claiming that it was about nothing at all, because Helen was never really there.

- H. D.** *Helen*
- H. D.** *Eurydice*, opening section
- ♪ **H. D.** *Helen in Egypt*, selection read by the author

D. No Trivial Ending

Capriccio (1942), the last stage work of **Richard Strauss**, is in effect a meta-opera about the nature of opera itself—another *LateStyle* device. Set in the time of Mozart, the one-act piece of almost chamber delicacy is about a Countess who is loved by both a poet and a composer, and must choose between them.

- ♪ **Strauss:** *Capriccio*, the spoken sonnet
- ♪ **Strauss:** *Capriccio*, the sung sonnet and trio
- ♪ **Strauss:** *Capriccio*, ending
Metropolitan Opera, 2011. c. Andrew Davis, d. John Cox. Renée Fleming (Countess), Joseph Kaiser (Flamand), Russell Braun (Olivier)

E. A Sicilian Saga

Prince Giuseppe di Lampedusa was a Sicilian aristocrat and man of letters. He wrote his only novel *Il Gattopardo* (the Leopard) at the very end of his life in an attempt to come to terms with the decline of his own ancient family and an entire way of life, going back a hundred years to point to the watershed moment of change. We will sample it from the 1963 film by another aristocrat, **Luchino Visconti**.

- ♪ **Lampedusa:** *The Leopard* (1958), opening pages
translated by Archibald Colquhoun, read by David Horovich
- ♪ **Visconti:** *The Leopard* (1963), selections
Burt Lancaster (Fabrizio), Claudia Cardinale (Angelica), Alain Delon (Tancredi); music by Nino Rota

Full Names of Artists, Composers, and Writers

H. D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886–1961), Giuseppe Tomasi di **Lampedusa** (1896–1957), **Grandma Moses** (Anna Mary Robertson Moses, 1860–1961), Pablo **Picasso** (1881–1973), William **Shakespeare** (1564–1616), Richard **Strauss** (1864–1949), Joseph Mallord William **Turner** (1775–1851), Luchino **Visconti** (1906–76)

brunyate.com/sunset-harvest/