

# Sunset Harvest



## 4. Recognition

April 28, 2022

# Recognition

UNLIKE PREVIOUS CLASSES (and the way I advertised this one), there will not be two or three featured artists whose work we shall study in detail, but some twenty poets, painters, and composers, each of whom has looked Death in the eye. Their reasons include age, sickness, suicide, war, or simply an elegiac disposition. Sometimes the closeness of death has brought about a marked change in manner; in others, it has emphasized tendencies that were there all along, so not all these last works imply a Late Style. And not all are necessarily morbid; we shall find examples that approach death with courage, passion, clear-eyed recognition, and even humor. *rb.*

## A. Looking Death in the Eye

Two *Self-Portraits* and three poems written by artists in late middle-age, all open-eyed and unsentimental, but distinguished by the different ways in which each views the approaching end.

**Picasso:** *Self-Portrait Facing Death* (1972)

**Toorop:** *Last Self-Portrait* (1955)

♪ **Smith:** *Black March* (1971), read by Caroline Harker

**Bishop:** *Sonnet* (1979)

♪ **Stevens:** *The Hermitage at the Center* (1954)

## B. Death Comes Too Soon

Two cases of young artists aware of their terminal illness: **John Keats** in this hour, and **Franz Schubert** in the next.

♪ **Keats:** *To Autumn*, read by Matthew Coulton

## C. I Went Hunting Wild

Poets and painters in the First World War, four Germans and one Briton, working in the knowledge that they were living on borrowed time.

**Dix:** *Self-Portraits as a Soldier* (1914–18)

**Stramm:** *Guard Duty* (1915)

**Macke:** *Farewell* (1914)

**Marc:** *The Fate of the Animals* (1913, Basel)

♪ **Owen:** *Strange Meeting* (1918), read by Alex Jennings

## D. Where Are We Going?

The last or late works of three painters and one poet who were contemplated suicide (and in all but one case succeeded).

**Van Gogh:** *Wheatfield with Crows* (1890)

**Gauguin:** *Where Do We Come From?* (1898, Boston MFA)

**Rothko:** The de Menil Chapel, Houston (1971)

♪ **Plath:** *Poppies in October* (read by the author)

**Plath:** *Poppies in July*

## E. An Ecstasy of Parting

The special case of Emily Dickinson whose poetry is permeated with thoughts of death, even decades before her own. We will hear the three poems read in the closing sequence of the 2015 film *A Quiet Passion*: “My life closed twice before its close,” “Because I could not stop for Death,” and “This is my letter to the world.”

♪ **Terence Davies** : *A Quiet Passion* (2015), closing sequence  
(Cynthia Nixon as Emily Dickinson)

## F. Four Musical Farewells

Moments from the last works of Beethoven and Schubert, plus the last movement of what Gustav Mahler feared might be his final work, but turned out not to be—and, if time, the actual last music he left on his desk when he died.

♪ **Beethoven:** *String Quartet, Op.135*, last mvt. (Ariel Quartet)

♪ **Schubert:** *String Quintet, Op.163*, excerpts (Borodin Quartet)

♪ **Mahler:** *Das Lied von der Erde*, closing pages  
(Carolyn Watkinson, *mezzo-soprano*; Kurt Sanderling, *conductor*)

♪ **Mahler:** *Symphony #10* (Deryck Cooke version), closing pages  
(Rotterdam PO, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, *conductor*)

## Full Names of Artists, Composers, and Writers

Ludwig van **Beethoven** (1770–1827), Elizabeth **Bishop** (1911–79), Emily **Dickinson** (1830–86), Otto **Dix** (1891–1969), Paul **Gauguin** (1848–1903), John **Keats** (1795–1821), August **Macke** (1887–1914), Gustav **Mahler** (1860–1911), Franz **Marc** (1880–1916), Wilfred **Owen** (1893–1918), Pablo **Picasso** (1881–1973), Sylvia **Plath** (1932–63), Mark **Rothko** (1903–70), Franz **Schubert** (1797–1828), Stevie **Smith** (1902–71), Wallace **Stevens** (1879–1955), August **Stramm** (1874–1915), Charley **Toorop** (1891–1955), Vincent **van Gogh** (1853–90)

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