

Osher at JHU, Spring 2022

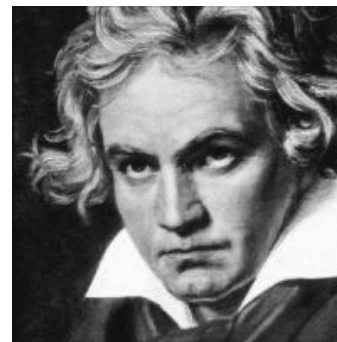
Thursdays, 1:00 to 3:00 PM

Roger Brunyate, instructor

Sunset Harvest

MY SUBJECT is the Indian Summer that many artists, writers, and composers seem to experience towards the end of their lives. It can take the shape of radical experiment with traditional forms as with Beethoven, a deep dive into memory as with Proust, or an inner radiance as with Rembrandt. Artists (of whatever kind) may approach their last works with lingering regret, flinty realism, or most surprisingly with an access of joyous energy. Not all will exhibit the same stylistic fingerprints, but there are enough common features to enable us to talk about this strange phenomenon I call *LateStyle*; we will examine a few of them.

At the same time, this is a subject that defies easy classification. Many of the artists discussed below could equally well be featured in a different class; others feature as exceptions to the rule rather than examples of it. Shakespeare died at 54, Beethoven at 57, and Rembrandt at 63—none old by modern standards—yet all exhibited distinct *LateStyle* features. Some artists lived a long time, but their work did not substantially change. Others died young; the question is whether they knew that they would do so. All in all, consistent or not, it makes for a course of considerable variety. rb.



Exploration

April 7. In his last years, the stone-deaf **Beethoven** wrote music that he could hear only in his head, music that ignored formal expectations in search of direct expression of struggle and eventually transcendence. We will consider the question of *LateStyle* in other

art forms also, with a look at the late work of painters such as Goya and Turner, and poets Keats and Yeats.

Retreat

April 14. Some aging artists retreat into an earlier age, because it offers an irony that can show the present in a different light. We see this in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, in the long poem *Helen in Egypt* by Hilda Doolittle (H. D.), and in *Capriccio*, the final opera of Richard Strauss. And especially in *The Leopard*, the posthumously-published novel by Sicilian Prince **Giuseppe di Lampedusa**.

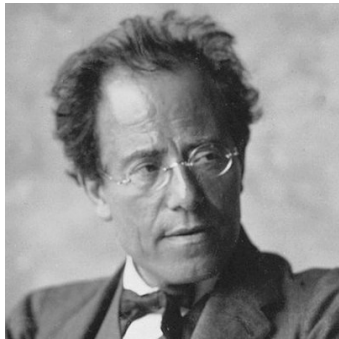


Incandescence

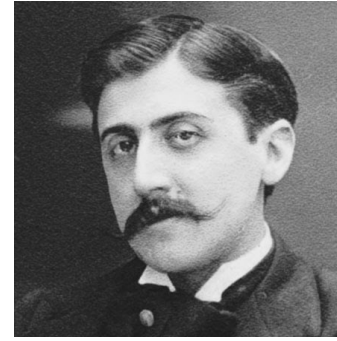
April 21. *Death in Venice*, the last opera by **Benjamin Britten**, may be a tragedy about aging and obsession, but all is finally dissolved in the limpid Venetian light. Other artists have bathed themselves in light and color during their last years: Claude Monet in his garden at Giverny, Paul Bonnard in his wife's tiled bathroom, and poet Derek Walcott in the sun of the Caribbean.

Recognition

April 28. We consider artists who have looked death in the face, whether because of their own illness, as with Franz Schubert and Emily Dickinson, or impending involvement in war, as with the Expressionists Franz Marc and August Macke. We end with *The Song of the Earth* by **Gustav Mahler**, who knew his days were numbered but ended his work in a lovely lingering farewell.



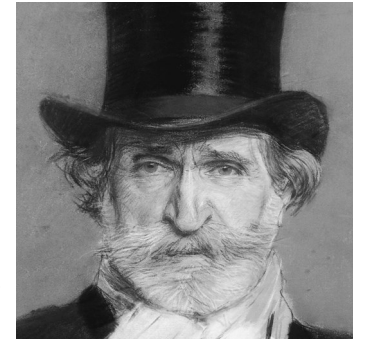
Memory



May 5. The older people get, the easier it is to dwell in the past. The last volume of **Marcel Proust's** *Remembrance of Things Past*, was published posthumously. Poet C. P. Cavafy mined his own memories and those of his Alexandrian Greek culture. The later sculptures of Louise Bourgeois incorporate coded childhood memories, such as her series of giant spiders that she called *Maman* (Mother).

Joy

May 12. After a lifetime of melodrama and tragedy, **Giuseppe Verdi** turned to comedy in his last opera, *Falstaff*, which he premiered at age 80. Though never a stranger to joy in his earlier work, Henri Matisse rediscovered his youthful energy in colorful paper cutouts. Even the stern abstractionist Piet Mondrian seemed to be entering new ground in his last works, *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* and *Victory Boogie-Woogie*.



Handouts for each class and related materials will be posted at:

www.brunyate.com/sunset-harvest/

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