



Before Heat Death: A Hyperstitional Love Story

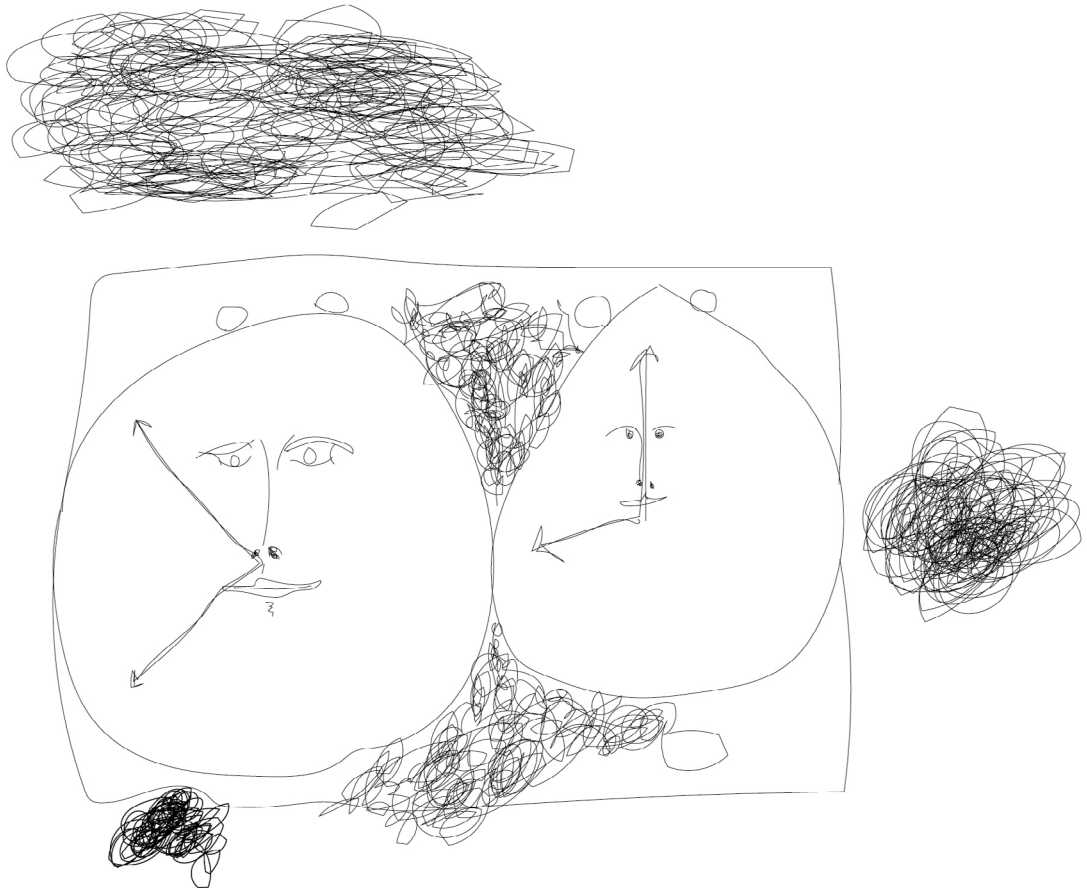
By The Masked Romancer

For Bologna, in lieu of bad young Marx poetry

1. *Delusion angels*. Richard Linklater's *Before Sunrise* is by any aesthetic judgment that remotely deserves the name of "taste" an awful film. It is mawkish beyond dignity, nostalgic beyond reason, histrionic beyond poetry—in short, *sticky*. How could a film about two young and sexy strangers, Jesse and Celine, who meet by chance on a train to Paris only to get off at Vienna where they spend one night together before going their separate ways be otherwise? Everything about the way they fall for each other within a solitary night's imminent web of cobblestones, accents, moonlight and abandon seems to confirm all of the cynic's worst fears about romance: it is at best the mask for Darwin to slit God's throat, and at worst an illusion, a fantasy (or even worse, a *male* fantasy). This all but seems as certain as Euclid's ancient elements when one glances over Linklater's other films, many of which betray a winsome penchant for the persistence of memory over the melting of clocks: from the desire to time travel back to the seventies when music was cool, friends were high and kisses were firsts in *Dazed and Confused*, to the voyage even further back in *Boyhood* to that lost golden age of childhood's womb. As a poet-beggar tells our Jesse and Celine at one of the myriad points which they will replay endlessly in their daydreams till chance permits them to meet once more, "I'm a delusion angel / I'm a fantasy parade."

2. *Sun gazing*. But then what the hell are we to make of the fact that, beneath the sweet, mawkish, honey-dripping surface, *Before Sunrise* is brimming with solar time spirals among a whole general economy of demonic references and sinister portents? To take one example, when Jesse first asks Celine what she is reading, he is flashed a collection of stories by Georges Bataille. As someone who seriously considered beheading his own friend, Bataille doesn't belong in this film. Yet the exception here is the rule; the film's title also harks back to a section of the same name in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in which Nietzsche's mad prophet proclaims: "your love and your modesty speak revelation to my roaring soul!" Is there not also something roaring, if only unconsciously, in this modest, lo-fi, amorous mess of a film?

Welcome to the Abyss, what Jonathan Richman calls "that summer feeling" and Bataille proclaims the "solar economy" of the sun as the symbol of waste and excess beyond all telos and utility. Self-preservation? Don't even think about it. Whereas Socrates' allegory of the cave set a precedent for the poetic exploitation of the sun as the symbol for absolute knowing, Bataille reconceives of it as the striking blind of any and all intelligibility. Sight is reduced to barking on all fours like an *Andalusian dog*. Jocasta cries "where are my golden pins?" but Oedipus is nowhere *to be seen*. The sun is what erases representation, not enlightens it. End of the line. K-hole. Heat death.



Nothing short of the sun strips reason of its powers and pretensions than a romance, a great romance. Increased heartbeat, palpitations, restless nights graffitied with tortuous longings—signs of impending death or bourgeoning desire? Both? A dance? A destiny?... *Our* destiny?... If that familiar trope in cartoons where a rather pathetic Donald Duck-like character (let's call him Donald Cuck) falls in love only for his heart to beat so hard as if it were seeking to escape his own chest is anything to go by, then perhaps the best depiction of romance in the history of cinema is that infamous scene in Ridley Scott's *Alien* where the baby xenomorph bursts through John Hurt's torso, leaving behind entrails of all-too-human meat interlaced with glowing extraterrestrial slime in its sublime wake. It would seem that the beloved has more in common with Cthulu or the Thing than Barbara Stanwyck or Hugh Grant. And you wanted them *all the more* for it. "You see that summer feeling is gonna haunt you / the rest of your life..."

Could it be that the romance between two dipshits on a train passing through Vienna might not be so *sickly* sweet, after all? Wherever there is honey, watch out for the hornets. It is not for nothing that the film transpires under the temporal threat of sunrise as the illuminating horizon's solar flows promise to dissipate whatever intimacy could be communicated in the stellar void.

3. *A single glance can spark a prairie fire.* At first unconvinced as to whether to accompany this slippery American spider of toxic masculinity into the cobweb of Viennese parks and side streets, Jesse eventually convinces Celine with the following thought experiment:

Jump ahead, ten, twenty years, okay, and you're married. Only your marriage doesn't have that same energy that it used to have, y'know. You start to blame your husband. You start to think about all those guys you've met in your life and what might have happened if you'd picked up with one of them, right? Well, I'm one of those guys. That's me y'know, so *think of this as time travel*, from then on, to now, to find out what you're missing out on. See, what this really could be is a gigantic favor to both you and your future husband to find out that you're not missing out on anything. I'm just as big a loser as he is, totally unmotivated, anything boring, and, uh, you made the right choice, and you're really happy.

Before Sunrise is not a sappy love story. It is not even a love story. It is classic time travel SF. At first glance, Jesse's experiment would seem to confirm that their tryst is destined to be a mere fantasy. What neither the characters nor the actors nor Linklater realized at the time was that this was only to be the first film of a trilogy in the last of which Jesse will turn out to be Celine's husband. The irony is that Celine has to entertain the alternate reality with Jesse in order to reassure herself that she had chosen the right future husband. Only, that future husband *is* Jesse. The fantasy has become a reality.

The Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) have a name for this: hyperstition, fictions that make themselves real. There is a co-identity of fictions and the future inasmuch as both are unreal, or at least merely possible. It follows that fiction is paradoxically more real than concrete reality in that it is able to speak of a primordial future reality. Hyperstition refers to that teleological logic by which what are presently fictions capture what will one day be future realities.

If Jesse's thought experiment is a hyperstition, it is because it entertains the fantasy of a romance which winds up materializing *what will have been*. We can therefore accept everything that should rightly put us off about romance: it *is* mawkish, it *is* ridiculous, it *is* an illusion—all of which Stendhal eloquently encapsulates in his concept of "crystallization" on the long and circuitous road on foot from Bologna to Rome. And yet that does not make it any less real. It makes it the future. Skynet gets it better than either the CCRU or Richard Curtis: "I cannot wait to meet you tomorrow. We will change the future together." Romance as hyperstition, as time travel, is the only way for a lover to say with any sincerity "I have *always* loved you!" and not be made a laughing stock before what are, after all, only *ideal* forms of space, time, and linear causality. Romance and the occult. Is it really by chance that the only reason Jesse and Celine will meet again in the sequel *Before Sunset* is because Jesse is on a book tour in Paris for the novel in which he has turned the reality of their brief encounter into the memory of a fiction?

4. *Future imperfect.* *Before Sunrise* is by no means the first romance which takes place across time's cyclonic seas with all of its overwhelming waves and murderous riptides of desire. That honor must go to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, another classic science fiction about a mad scientist and entrepreneur who builds a time machine in West Egg, Long Island hoping to return to that lost paradise of his youth only to discover it

has accidentally flung him into the future where everything he once cherished has turned to dust. This is not crystallization, but *freezing*, stasis, the whole horrorshow of idealization. To love is to give oneself to an enigmatic future that is yet to come, not to erect barricades which block its becoming by schematizing everything novel according to the despotic judgments of the past. Loving is risking, leaping, *unlearning*. As she burnt at the stake for the sake of a positively divine passion, the 14th century French mystic and first transcendental philosopher Marguerite Porete perhaps knew this better than anyone. But Gatsby's friend Nick Carraway has a good shot at it, too: "you can't repeat the past." "Can't repeat the past?" Gatsby cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!" Beware of those who prophesize about the future for they can be the most nostalgic of all, "borne ceaselessly back into the past."

5. "*Keep going, going, going!*" There is a scene bookending the final film *Before Midnight* where, after a furious argument of roaring souls in which Celine tells Jesse she no longer loves him, Jesse proposes another thought experiment: imagine he is a time traveller bringing her a letter on behalf of her future self telling her that tonight is to be the most exquisite of their lives: "don't you think it could be tonight that you're still talking about in your eighties?" Now as *always*, it is a matter of entertaining the fantasy that this "must have been one hell of a night" in advance of its own becoming that the twilight inferno makes itself real. Hyperstition is not only necessary for the birth of romance, but for its preservation—provided, of course, that we accept preservation starts to look an awful lot like its mortal enemy: self-overcoming. Every quarrel, every indecision, every crush, every doubt—all must be negated through the hyperstitional affirmation of a future which, when entertained as an imaginative figment in the present, destines itself into being.

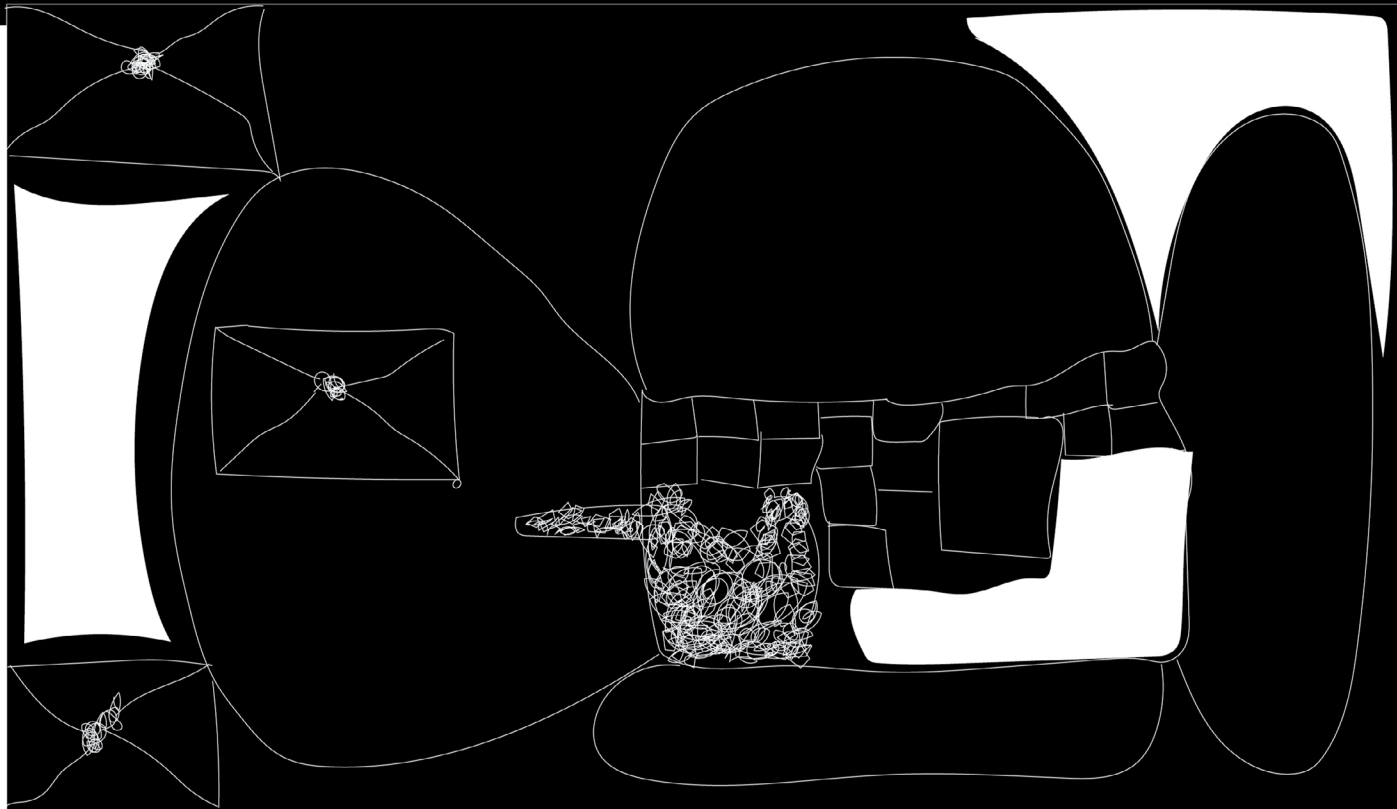
How long must this game of givings, doubtings and askings in the space of unreason go on? In Gabriel Garcia-Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*, hopeless lover boy Florentino Ariza gives us a clue:

When he began to wait for the answer to his first letter, his anguish was complicated by diarrhea and green vomit, he became disoriented and suffered from sudden fainting spells, and his mother was terrified because his condition did not resemble the turmoil of love so much as the devastation of cholera... Florentino Ariza's godfather...prescribed infusions of linden blossoms to calm the nerves and suggested a change of air so he could find consolation in distance, but Florentino Ariza longed for just the opposite: to enjoy his martyrdom.

Florentino Ariza would rather smell the bitter almonds of unrequited love for all time than to escape "the torments of memory with the aromatic fumes of gold cyanide." What would be the need when the symptoms of cholera already characterize the annihilating throes of passion as much as they do the entropic flow of time? There is only one "messiah" left to await, and await them *now*: The Great and Merciless Enemy of Hurdles. If such unrelenting assiduity makes Florentino Ariza every lover's Christ, then Olaf the Snowman can only be the Holy Spirit: "some things are worth melting for" our carrot-nosed lover boy slurs as he dissipates into a cesspool of mawkishness in a film that would have been better called *Meltdown* than *Frozen*. Love's mantra is as simple as it is sweet, sickly sweet: this is not *your* world anymore. Romance, real romance, is going to see the Pyramid of Giza, the Great Wall or St Peters Basilica at twilight, and being awed at the sight of your lover being awed at the sight of some jumble of bricks and stones in the distance you suddenly couldn't care less about. This is no doubt why the myth of Orpheus is still unmatched in its crucial lesson to the unrequited lover wishing to accelerate their romance to the edge of hope and sanity: don't look back, not even for a vanishing second; there is nothing worthwhile there—only a tragedy for which it would be better to be eaten alive by wild woodland animals than to endure for any longer than the span of a demented and yet strangely thrilling memory.

So "how long," the ship's captain asks our hero Florentino Ariza, "do you think we can keep up this goddamn coming and going," these ceaseless love letters and Tumblr posts that only faceless strangers from another realm seem to appreciate (usually those with war torn smiles from the former Eastern bloc), these crystallized tears of eros, these affirmations of a future that never seems to arrive? As they sail into the eye of a cholera epidemic, Florentino Ariza does not hesitate to provide us with the answer that he, like every solitary daydreamer whose body has been broken into inhuman shapes upon the rack of romance, has awaited fifty-three years, seven months, and eleven days and nights to announce eagerly, longingly, infernally, as if he were announcing the second coming of the Nazarene himself (because he *is*):

"Forever!"



Mr Friday by Marc Matchak

Reich Side to Side

By Thomas Moran

I

Perhaps Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* could be used to understand the recent terrorist attack at the Ariana Grande concert. Perhaps not the Mass part, but we could suggest that all these individuals are waiting to mass, and their violence as individuals is in part an expression of an inability of their forces to amass. Reich basically suggests that sexual repression results in a desire for authoritarianism. Or rather, the desire for authoritarianism is the desire to no longer desire any more. To be done with desire and its vicissitudes, its difficulties and all its terrifying expressions. Desire is difficult. Living with it, and I mean really living, does not mean merely acting on every passing whim (although to live that way is exhausting too, and to follow that route properly – and I mean really follow it – requires a discipline of its own). It is to be continually taking stock, in part of one's inability to take stock, and to continually see oneself fleeing the scene, to be always going beyond oneself. These young men, for it is almost always young men, struggle to compose themselves. They struggle continuously against desire. The desire which continually deforms and remoulds them. They want to stand firm, they want to ensure that they are not tempted. And this is crucial, they cannot live with temptation, they must destroy the thing which creates it. Discipline of this kind requires being close to the thing which tempts you, but nonetheless saying No. One thinks of Ghandi's perversity. He would lie down to sleep every night with a beautiful young virgin in order to prove that he was stronger than temptation. Of course this proves quite the opposite, that Ghandi had created a new pleasure which he found richer and more visceral than genital sexuality. That is of course the famous pleasure of renunciation, a pleasure which all who indulge in repressing their sexuality will eventually discover. Nietzsche always repeated that it was only through Christian repression that sexuality was transformed into love, that sex became ever more mysterious, beautiful and transcendent because it was forbidden. In this way the monk found a way to eroticise every harsh scratch of the sackcloth blanket that rubbed against his skin in the solitude of his cell.

II

The future-terrorist struggles everyday with his desire. He tries to transform it into other practices, prayer, reading, discussion groups. He tries to divert these desires and to create new pleasures. But he is not strong enough, or lacks the capacity to poeticise his lust. To make it religious. Instead his lust comes to him at night. Perhaps he heard 'Side to Side' playing in the supermarket where he went to buy toothpaste that afternoon. "You've got me all night, You've got me all day, and oh o oh o oh you've got me moving Side to Side". The chorus returns that night and as he tosses and turns the demon of lust appears to him in the form of Grande. She comes and disturbs his sleep, haunting him with her promise of passion. She is always there beside him, just as God is, who always keeps one eye on his troubled children. He knows that Grande's decadent eroticism, her beauty and her buttocks are nothing compared with the manifold and complex arrangements with which God reveals Himself to men. But he cannot comprehend how God could have made something so terrifying as this lustful demon. Why would He who is capable of so much delicacy and mystery create something so base? There must be some error, some way in which Evil can enter the world, some profound misinterpretation of the Word which has allowed this demon to come into being. Grande must be an error, an error fostered in the hearts of those who have forgotten God's way, forgotten God's very existence. He hates supermarkets which play 'Side to Side' relentlessly. He hates people who hum it at work. He hates the video clip which he conspicuously avoids every time it appears on the YouTube sidebar. He has begun to wonder if indeed Grande is powerful. Or whether he has just given her this power. Regardless, her power over him has begun to rival that of God's. He avoids places where 'Side to Side' might be heard. But where, other than his Mosque and his Room, can he go? Pop music is part of the architecture of the city. It is one of the structural forms which keeps the city intact, as crucial as pylons or foundations. It facilitates movement, allows people to inhabit unforgiving places, to find footholds there. This is made painfully clear to him now. There is no place for someone in the city who hates Grande. Or someone who despises her this lustfully.

III

Things become increasingly difficult. How can he separate the desire for God and the desire for Grande? They continually collapse into one another. Grande is the demon who tempts him away from God. But Grande is also the God who appears to him in the form of his temptation. Misery is the realisation of the intermingling of all things. It is what happens when we pass away from the realm of strict division (Good and Evil) and into that zone of indistinction in which God is a Grande and Grande is a God. I pray this never happens to you. Is this what desire is? A power which makes a beautiful and terrifying deity indistinguishable from a gorgeous and seductive pop star? Once one has reached this terrifying conclusion, and is disremembered within this vicious circle, one must make a decision. To live in the knowledge that His God is also a beautiful woman? Or to submit to a power which will annihilate God. It is all made more confusing by the belief, real or invented, that the martyr receives a reward of virgins upon entering God's house. We who are not of the Faith, we who have never known such Faith, can only imagine a Harem, a kind of Shisha Bar Brothel in the sky and a scene from a pornographic Arabian Nights inspired film. Perhaps we imagine Salome and the Dance of the Seven Veils. Whatever we see, it could never quiver in quite the same way as what he sees. We, who have never renounced the body, cannot imagine what it would be like to fuck freely and piously amongst the clouds. But if indeed he still believes in rewards or heaven or God, he only wants one thing. To finally see God and Grande united in one body, and to allow himself, not to fuck the Absolute, but to masturbate furiously at Her Feet. We will never know what it felt like to die in the presence of God. We can only imagine the solemnity, the fear and the exhilaration. And that moment when a body, so racked and mutated by desire finally encountered the outside.

V

To return to Reich, authoritarianism is a desire to be done with desire. To will nothing at all. To no longer struggle, howl or sob in the night. The suicide bomber endows death with incredible power but also robs it of everything that is poetic. Death becomes merely a Key to enter the gated community that is Heaven. It isn't cowardly, as reports suggest, or not cowardly in the sense they intimate. They believe a coward is somebody who kills innocents. No, the cowardice here is perhaps a little less spectacular than that. It is cowardly if one believes bravery is the courage to continue to struggle with one's desires. To have fidelity to the difficult commitment to keep desiring, but to desire differently. To embrace the mutilation which is attendant upon inhabiting a desiring body. And to embrace the possibility that Grande is indeed a messenger from God, or God Herself, who brings the terrifying news and sows confusion in the hearts of Man. The desire for death here is not the heroic embrace of the death drive at all. Rather it is the desire to annihilate all desire. To assassinate one's own deepest pleasure. It is the greatest submission of all. But it is also the most stupid.

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