

Harold and Maude & Generation Death

Deep Strawberry

2025

In the 1971 movie, *Harold and Maude*, a boy-man sewn into an upper class lineage headed by a satirically tyrannical matriarch stages his own suicide again and again. The first scene depicts his fake self-hanging, “OH HARROLD!” His mother’s admonishment is delivered with all the horror-shock Harold meant for her, but also cloying authority, the absolute order Harold cannot escape.

Harold meets Maude in a cemetery. Maude is a free bird, an 80-year-old eccentric, adorable with twisted, pinned braids. She is widely cited as the original Manic Pixie Dream Girl (i.e. the stereotypical woman in film whose function is to teach a man lessons upliftingly). They fall in love.

Harold’s suicidal impulse is immediately relatable to those born in Generation X. People born between 1965 and 1980 were weaned on late stage capitalism that bloomed floridly into representational capitalism from which it looks like there is no going back.

The Gen X Three Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Curtis Yarvin, Peter Theil, Elon Musk are like the children of *Harold and Maude*’s bad divorce. In this alternative timeline, both regress back to acting out: Harold performs nihilism again and again and again and again, Maude trills liberally past a graveyard of 20th century soldiers, “Oh how the world loves a cage!” as if her own essence delusionally contains freedom, as if her desire for it will break its bars. If we only just all drank Oat Straw tea. Or went to Burning Man. Or popped a metformin, Theil’s anti-aging wonder drug.

The Thanatos generation is meant for The End. They anxiously harbored in the end of the 20th century, and immediately: explosions, wars, militarized anti-protest violence, killings by racist police, neoliberalism, social media addiction, widespread disease, weather emergencies, and Trump. Thanatos is in the generation’s music, the synthesized soundtrack for a New Order everyone already agreed was dystopian.

It seems now all of us fetishize apocalypse, thirst for it. It’s not a position, it’s a disposition, an orientation become the best/only philosophy (some time I’ll write about the difference between nihilism and pessimism, perhaps the real essay).

We can distinguish this Thanatos two ways borrowing Nietzsche’s categories. Dionysian accelerationism feels like disturbing soil underground so new growth can alchemize. Apollonian accelerationism shoots humanity straight to the sun, or in Musk’s wetdream, to Mars.

These Three Horsemen found a way to survive nihilism through money and for their men, created the Alt-Right Manosphere, so they too could survive. Any young man can now morph from an internet-addicted, “low value” nobody into a weightlifter who reads pseudo-philosophy or fascist philosophy, or maybe Trad Cath esotericism or Norse god shit, and deserves what is rightfully his.

Both classes turn their Thanatos, which is essentially the fate of being born into late capitalism and swallowed by it, back onto us. For any non-male, non-white person, the vibe is instantly recognizable. They want to conquer/kill us. The Horsemen are only helping the footsoldiers of their territory.

What fulminated through the internet is terrifyingly leaking. It rode in on weight lifting accounts, bro podcasts, esoteric self help, European heritage instagram, racist memes, Savitri Devi, Bronze Age Mindset, Nick Land, Julius

Evola, Ernst Junger, ecofascism, rightwing antiglobalization, trad wives and their hippie homebirth counterparts, the illiberal regimes of Europe...and its Nazism.

The book *Black Pill: How I Witness the Darkest Corners of the Internet Come to Life, Poison Society, and Capture American Politics* adds a first-hand account of Charlottesville, and its internet build-up phase involving the Proud Boys, Richard Spencer and Four Chan. All bros across the board, excruciatingly organized around masculinity.

It's Nazism but also regular patriarchy, colonialism and stupid old capitalism. They call it Darwinism, which is where gender essentialism comes in— Alpha/Chad, Divine Feminine, survival of the fittest, Blood and Soil, it's only natural, Nature. Capitalism is the *order of the things*, Yarvin rolls his eyes.

The thing boys may not know about the Manic Pixie Dream Girl is that her mania is triggered by deathiness. Her lifey, reproducing, creative energy explodes to sparkles around the heavy, unmutable arrow of masculine countenance. Maude's vitality is reaction formation to the 20th century. It took thirty or so times watching *Harold and Maude* for me to notice the numbers tattooed on her forearm. Maude is a Holocaust survivor, she's giving Harold the gift of trauma-magic.

The scene is the day of Maude's 80th birthday. She has chosen this day for her actual death, in a radical decision to seize autonomy over the length of her life. "I took the pills an hour ago" (*transatlantic cinema accent*). A heart-wrenching Cat Stevens music sequence depicting Harold's desperate and grievous Emergency Room attempt, then upon its failure, a rain-soaked drive in his DIY hearse-sportscar. We watch (in tears) the car accelerate and fly off a cliff.

All is lost. Both characters. Liberalism, she's gone, as is her lover. Then we see Harold strumming a banjo, silly-dancing on a Big Sur cliff. His final performance. He escaped the finality of his real deathwish.

As much as the frozen hearse/Jag in the air before its fall is the perfect image of the American Left now, I want instead to focus on the banjo playing. Maude's manic pixie liberation set Harold free of his Fluxus badassery to be a life-desiring hippie who plays banjo.

The point is, they are *both* performance artists. It was all representation. Just like we know by barely scratching with one nail, that underneath the twisty language of "libertarianism," Big Tech is neocolonialism. Scratch scratch, data mining, surveillance, enslaved African miners, unlimited expansion, population control. The Horsemen are two white lads from South Africa and one contrarian grandson of communists/son of a government worker. It seems unclear if the Horsemen are accelerationists or marketers, selling us back our endtime feelings for their own gain.

We *also* know that every person defeated by that which liberalism's performance art has (barely) obscured for a few short years, has liked, shared or happy-posted Luigi Mangione. Luigi is the alpha and omega. He did the deed and also performed it. He literally won the internet. It carried, memed, and lauded his actual radical act.

Insofar as it set off *that*, rather than something else, his action was pacified (for now) by representational logic, that is, an emetic discharge of feeling. Its legacy is carried by the Thanatos generation's main accomplishment—the internet. It was sadomasochistic as an excellent tweet that rewrites justice in short, sweet poetry, mean and perfect as Curtis Yarvin's writing (or his pink mirror, Joshua Clover's). But why not kill Musk? Theil? Trump? Who even *has the power* in the afterlife of *Harold and Maude*? Like if Maude lived. What would they do together?

Go to the theatre, obviously.

One idea. Let's perform the end. Every party, every rave, night club and dinner will enact: less species, more human violence, starvation, foraging, a heating environment. In collectively creating our end, maybe we will find not only satisfaction (finally), but a new relationship to the end that might suggest a way through.

The real gift Maude gave Harold was recognizing the autonomy denied to him. It may not be 20th century manic pixie liberation, but we know not yet just who we'll meet.

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Fifth Estate #416, Spring 2025

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