

***Before Midnight* (2013)**

“Still there... still there... still there... Gone.”

Major Credits:

Director: Richard Linklater

Screenplay: Richard Linklater, Julie Delpy, Ethan Hawke

Cast: Julie Delpy (Céline), Ethan Hawke (Jesse), Walter Lassally (Patrick), Panos Karonis (Stefanos), Athina Rachel Tsangari (Ariadni), Seamus Davey-Fitzpatrick (Hank)

Cinematography: Christos Voudouris

Production Background:

Before Midnight is the third film that follows the romantic relationship between Jesse and Céline, whom Jesse first meets on a train to Vienna in *Before Sunrise* (1995) and then again in Paris ten years later in *Before Sunset* (2004). In the first movie, at 23, they fall in love but must part; in the second, at 32, they rekindle their romance. Now they are a couple at the end of a six week summer vacation in Greece. As in the earlier films, Linklater is interested in the passage of time—both the nearly real time (approximately twelve hours) in which they interact and the near decade during which their lives have changed—as well as the quality of their conversation. In its attentiveness to virtually uninterrupted dialogue, the trilogy follows the tradition of the French New Wave director Eric Rohmer’s “Six Moral Tales.” In its compression of time in addition to its sustained conversation, Linklater also has been influenced by the film of another New Wave auteur, Louis Malle, and his great film *My Dinner with André* (1981). Finally, in its interest in how people change over decades, *Before Midnight* might be considered a fictional counterpart to Michael Apter’s *Up* documentary series, currently almost forty years in the making. Linklater’s next film, *Boyhood* (2014; also with Ethan Hawke), continues his experiment with time, shooting the story over a period of twelve years with the same cast.

Cinematic Aspects:

1. Structure: Although the story seems plotless and the dialogue spontaneous, the three writers have consciously created a drama in five clearly defined acts (with the relatively brief Kalamata airport scene serving as a prelude). Can you identify each stage of the development?
2. Long Take: Beginning with the uninterrupted car ride, Linklater shoots lengthy sequences without editing to create the sense of events happening in real time. (The nearly 15-minute drive, for example, incorporates only a single shot of the passing ruins to break up the two-shot of the couple talking in the front seat.) Cinematographer Voudouris employs a Steadicam to smooth out the long walk into town in the fourth act.
3. Acting: Hawke and Delpy are onscreen for the duration of the film. They were alternately charming and sophomoric in the first film; here, especially in the first half,

they both run the risk of becoming irritating or simply boring in their efforts to play the part of grown-ups while trying to remain forever young. Jesse seems narcissistic at times; Céline can be self-righteous. Having helped to script their characters, Hawke and Delpy know Jesse and Céline as well as the couple, having been together for many years, know each other. Their performances appear spontaneous and therefore authentic. Note, in particular, how, in the last scene, Hawke idly picks up a napkin and convinces you that he is reading from it—even though the camera shows you that the napkin is blank.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Although *Before Midnight* exists as a stand-alone piece, how does the script employ exposition to bring uninitiated spectators up-to-date on the most important aspects of the couple's relationship before the story resumes in Greece?
2. Jesse's first two novels—*This Time, That Time*—were autobiographical, based on his two encounters with Céline. He describes his work-in-progress, a comic novel about people with Oliver Sachs-like mental disorders (permanent déjà vu, perfect memory for faces, etc.). What is the significance of this new project?
3. For all its naturalistic realism, *Before Midnight* also follows a Hollywood tradition, albeit in franker and angrier language, of the war-between-the-sexes epitomized in the Spencer Tracy—Katherine Hepburn movies. Their climactic argument, which several reviewers compared to Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973), was the roughest since Tony and Carmella duked it out in *The Sopranos*. Be honest: whose side were you on? (Or have the auteurs managed to make it a perfectly even fight?)