

“Twin Fantasy (Mirror to Mirror)Review” by Sam Freer



Twin Fantasy album cover (Left)



Will Toledo (Right)

When Will Toledo's cult classic album *Twin Fantasy* was released in 2011, it set the standard for indie artists telling a story with their music. A concept album about a troubled relationship he was in at the time, *Twin Fantasy* is certainly more than just another break-up album.

Who is Car Seat Headrest?

Born William Barnes, Will Toledo began recording music in high school under the name Nervous Young Men, however, he wouldn't continue for long. Car Seat Headrest became Toledo's next project. The name, a reference to how he would record in his car to have a private space, without being able to afford any form of proper studio. Toledo first began recording under the pseudonym in 2010. Car Seat Headrest had a definite



lo-fi sound, with low-quality recordings for both the vocals and instrumentals, and a mixing that heavily favoured the instrumental.

In 2015, Toledo was signed to Matador records. Around that time, three new members joined, making Car Seat Headrest a band, not just a solo act. Andrew Katz on drums, Seth Dalby on Bass, and Ethan Ives on guitar. The albums after the signing have a more polished, well-recorded sound to them, but Car Seat Headrest still maintains its lo-fi, and garage-y sound.

Twin Fantasy (Mirror to Mirror)

What is it really?

In 2011, Will Toledo was in the greatest slump of his life. He had a hard time fitting into the college environment wherever he went, he had not many friends, and was recording his unsuccessful music in a dorm closet, somehow even sadder than the back of a car. To top it all off, he was in a terrible relationship, not happy with how he was, nor how his partner was. From this turmoil, came his magnum opus, a concept album that just screams catharsis, with its stream-of-consciousness lyrics, and vocals chock full of passion. It reaches and grabs a large range of ideas about love, and its introspective lyrics not just tug, but tear at your heartstrings. The idea of a Twin Fantasy is supported by



the cover. To Will, the perfect partner is someone who he sees himself in, and as his relationship goes on

The Concept

A girl and a boy, in a long distance relationship, trying to keep it together, but wanting to be apart. Cate Wurtz is the girl in the story, she was an artist friend of Toledo. Cate Wurtz is a trans-woman, but on the album, Will uses masculine pronouns for her, as she had transitioned till after the album was out.

The idea of a Twin Fantasy is a fantastical relationship that Will imagines where he and his partner are almost connected as one, the same. Thus it is a Twin Fantasy. This idea ties in with the album well; as the album progresses we see that Will has created a character in his head of who he thinks his partner is, or should be. This is also referenced in the cover of the album, as when the two dogs hug, they're arms impossibly blend into the same arm.



Influences for the album.

Will Toledo wears many of his influences on his sleeve, especially Dan Bejar and his band Destroyer. Some of the lines he uses are a nod to some of Destroyers, and in track #7, he sings out asking for Dan Bejar's voice. Some other



resources he's cited include, The Beatles, The Who, They Might Be Giants, and R.E.M.

The sounds, the lyrics... The Vibe

The unique sound of Twin Fantasy comes from, well, just a usb microphone. Due to his limited funds, it was recorded as cheap as possible, in a closet with the cheapest mic available. It has a fuzzy, lo-fi sound that gives a unique sound and feel. The lyrics are introspective, and usually sung with a subdued drawl-like delivery; however, Toledo is able to sing with a lot of force, bringing his voice near breaking multiple times on the album. He'll sometimes enter his uniquely high, whistley falsetto. In instrumental breaks, he sometimes articulates them with a background faint screaming or yelling, usually pushing his voice to go for longer and with more intensity. Towards the end the album becomes more psychedelic, and anxiety-riddled, until, at the emotional climax, the listener is brought to an emotional, confusing, yet peaceful end with the last two tracks.

The Songs

Track #1: My Boy - Twin Fantasy

2:49

My Boy opens the album with a simple bass and stick click beat. The vocals then come in. The whole album has an echo, and crescendos, building in intensity. The whole song is composed of the same verse repeated three times, each more intense than the last, climaxing into a roar on the last repetition.

The lyrics establish that at this point, Will and Cate were already in a long distance, unhappy relationship, and although they were together, they both felt like they were alone.

Lyrics:[My Boy Lyrics](#)

Song:[My Boy Song](#)

Track #2: Beach Life-In-Death

12:10

On this incredible three part song about not just his relationship, but life, and how he's grown disillusioned to it, Toledo showcases his incredible ability to turn feelings into lyrics. Part 1 does not follow with any type of verse/chorus structure, instead being a long stream of consciousness, interrupted by instrumental breaks. It opens with distorted guitar strumming fast chords while Will daydreaming about a date he went on with Cate.



Harpers Ferry, where will and cate went for the date in the song

We also learn about how Will has been struggling with his sexuality. Shortly after, we get the first indication that, not only is his relationship strained, so is his mental health.

Part 1 ends with the lyrics:

“The ocean washed over your grave

The ocean opened your grave”

Those lyrics become a motif throughout the other two parts, and eventually return. They also return at the end of the album. Toledo has commented in interviews that these lyrics are about trying to bury his feelings for other people, but not being able to. Hence a grave being washed open.

The tone and subject matter of part 2 becomes noticeably darker than part 1, it has an almost psychedelic sound, and the lyrics talk more about Will Toledo’s growing disillusionment with life. It follows a more regular song structure with two verses and a chorus. Part 2 opens with Toledo singing about the destructive nature of his relationship. As part 2 goes on Toledo sings more and more about his own insecurities in the relationship and comes to terms with the fact that many problems in the relationship are on him, not just Cate.

Part 3 opens with a reprise of the energetic guitar from the beginning of the song mashed with the lyrics about killing his partner from part 2. Part 3 gives the song a circular ending, combining themes, motives, and lyrics from the other 2 parts to resolve them. The energy of the song builds, until

Will declares that he will “join Cate’s cult” and devote himself entirely to her. His grave has been opened completely to Cate, and she has consumed his life, bringing back the themes of the ending of each other part. Will ends the song by repeating the phrase

“The ocean washed over your grave

The ocean opened your grave”

As the phrase repeats it gets more and more psychedelic, with backwards or looping vocals. Will declares “*We’re too scared to do shit*” amidst the noisy vocals. That phrase gets extrapolated, looped, repeated, and cut off. It slowly takes over the calmer vocals about the ocean, and adds a sense of anxiety to the ending. Once the song has reached a climax of anxiety it suddenly cuts off, and sits in awkward silence, leading to the next song.

Lyrics:[Beach Life-In-Death Lyrics](#)

Song:[Beach Life-In-death Song](#)

Track #3: Stop Smoking

1:27

This track is a cry from Toledo's loved ones for him to stop his drug use. It opens with a calming strum on the guitar, that resets the build up of anxiety at the finale of the last track.. It is the most basic song on the album, just the repeated phrases,

“Stop smoking, we love you”, and then later

“And we don't want you to die” over an acoustic guitar. The phrase appears later in the Track “High to Death”

Lyrics:[Stop Smoking Lyrics](#)

Song:[Stop Smoking Song](#)

Track #4: Sober to Death

5:03

The first song following a traditional verse-chorus form, Sober to Death has become the definitive fan-favourite. It feels laid-back, the vocals are passionate, and the lyrics are well written.

It opens with a catchy, yet simple acoustic riff, continuing the lazy feel of the track before it. The riff loops under the verses of the song. The drumming is simple, and scarce. The vocals on the verses are relaxed, and rhythmically lazy. It trails off into a more speech-like cadence as opposed to singing occasionally.

The chorus is led up to by a break in the drums, as the acoustic guitar strums striking chords in unison with the vocals. The intensity of the whole song raises, and the song takes on a more urgent tone temporarily. The lyrics detail Will trying his best to calm down Cate. The song closes with a mantra-like repetition of the phrase

“Don’t worry, you and me won’t be alone anymore.”

The instrumental alternates between a simple acoustic guitar pattern, and distorted electric strumming. The song quiets down until the last repetition of the phrase, where it suddenly cuts off.

Lyrics:[Sober to Death Lyrics](#)

Song:[Sober to Death song](#)

Track #5: Nervous Young Inhumans

4:14

Throughout his works from the early 2010's, Will Toledo used the term "inhuman" as a label for people (usually himself) that were severely "flawed." On this track he uses it to describe him and Cate. He romanticises the idea of two people held together by their flaws. He says they should meet up in "Uncanny Valley", an idea in psychology in which things that appear almost human-like, are inherently creepy.

Nervous Young Inhumans opens with a punchy electric guitar strumming out chords. This marks the beginning of a trio of songs in a row that are more physical, pop-ier songs, that you could almost dance to. The later half of the track is taken up by a minute long monologue with a quiet rhythm section comping underneath. Will talks about writing the song, in particular, his use of the term "Galvanistic" in the chorus. He explains that it's based on Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein", which is of course about the idea of creating a human, or a character. He relates this to his idea of a "Twin Fantasy", and how he created a character of his partner in his mind.

Lyrics:[Nervous Young Inhumans](#)

Song:[Nervous Young Inhumans Song](#)

Track #6: Bodys

6:15

Bodys is the first song where we get a really good look at the almost abusive nature of the relationship. It takes place at a party, where Will wants to leave, but stays for Cate's sake. As the song goes on, it becomes clear that Will does not feel like he belongs, nor does he know what he's doing. Will

eventually gets drunk and realises that he'll only stay young for so long. Throughout the whole song, the lyrics reinforce that Will allowed himself to be a doormat to Cate, giving in to anything she wanted.

The chorus features multiple layers of vocals, one singing the main chorus, and one where he talks to Cate about different mundane things. By the end of the chorus he's talked himself into doing what Cate wants, which is to have sex. The last line of the chorus has Will asking to just meet at his place next time, instead of going to some big party.

The second time the chorus comes in at the end it has even more vocals layered on, not just the main chorus and talking, but other melodies and phrases from earlier in the song come back, adding to the anxiousness of the song.

Lyrics: [Bodys Lyrics](#)

Song: [Bodys Song](#)

Track #7: Cute Thing

5:21

Cute Thing is a great example of the funnier/cheekier side of Will Toledo's writing. It opens with Will apologising for being too romantic and sweet, and inviting Cate to come over for a week of debauchery and "weird sex." The whole song has a theme of Cate preferring sex over romantic gesture.



The track is very uptempo, and like the last 2, is punchy, physical, and danceable, despite the mood of the album not fitting a dance setting. Cute Thing has a very standard form for a rock song, and doesn't go on too long, making it very easy to listen to out of the context of the album.

Some other notably cheeky lyrics include, asking for *Dan Bejar's* voice, and *John Entwistle's* stage presence to become a rock god, and, “*Like, some Stanley Kubrick Porn director, casting couples eyes wide shut for a reason.*”

Lyrics:[Cute Thing Lyrics](#)

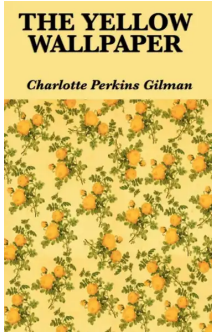
Song:[Cute Thing Song](#)

Track#8: High To Death

5:35

The trippy, psychedelic masterpiece High To Death marks a major shift in the tone of the album. The climax of Will's deteriorating mental health, ever rising anxiety, and heavy marijuana use, all spurred by the troubled relationship with Cate. At this point in their story, they've almost completely fallen apart, and Will becomes more and more desperate to hang on.

The guitar melody gives an immediate melancholic vibe, and gets more reverb as it goes on. The voice has lots of reverb that creates an almost wall of sound, and is sung in a very slurred drawl. The tempo is stately and grave. The lyrics describe Will being high on marijuana, confused, and anxious at night, sitting in his bed. The lyrics of track #3 come back, this



time twisted into “Keep Smoking” and “I don’t want to die.” Will references Gilman’s Yellow Wallpaper, a short story about a woman’s slow mental deterioration. He signs about how the wallpaper is moving around the room, and with the psychedelic instrumentals. It creates a strong image of what it’s like in his mind.

He likens Hell to the Sun, because they’re both “Balls on fire at the centre of things.” He repeats the phrase, and it slowly morphs into “A brain on fire at the centre of things”, a reference to his mental decline, the anxiety and depression.

The last verse is a reference to “Jugband Blues,” Syd Barret’s last song as Pink Floyd frontman. Syd Barret famously left the band due to his incredible amounts of drug use, so the reference could be connected to the title “High to Death.” The song fades out with just a distorted guitar.

Lyrics:[High to Death lyrics](#)

Song:[High to Death song](#)

Track #9: Famous Prophets (Minds)

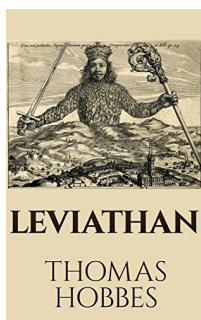
10:20

The second longest track on the LP, this track has become a fan favourite. The song takes place after Will and Cate break up, and is all about Will reflecting over his relationship with Cate. He jumps between desperation and trying to get Cate back, and moving on to a better self. He eventually decides that even though she has been abusive in the past, he also has to

take some blame for their failed relationship and keeps Cate as a friend he still cares about. However, he will still hold her responsible for all the abuse and problems she put him through. As the title of the track would suggest, it features biblical iconography relating to prophets speaking for God.

Famous Prophets takes a laid back tempo. It opens with just a bass, and no other instruments till drums and guitar come in around 1 minute in. The vocals are sung in a similar way to High to Death, but with no reverb. The songwriting shows what Will Toledo can really do, being more like a poem than a rock song.

On the 5th stanza, Will interlaces two lyrics, one comparing their relationship to getting struck by lightning. The other lyrics reference “Wouldn’t it be nice” by the Beach Boys, but the lyrics quickly take a sexual nature. The contrast between the two sets of lyrics demonstrates the contrast between Will and Cate, a comparison that runs through the whole song. The next stanza makes reference to “Leviathan”, both an Old



Testament beast, but also a 17th century book by Thomas Hobbes. The book touches on the Power of GOD in the Old Testament and how it was bestowed upon prophets.

As the song comes to a close, the lyrics

“Three transgressions of Wurtz, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment. Three transgressions of Will, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment.” (Wurtz is Cate’s last name) get

overlayed with the

“Ocean washed over/open your grave” lines from earlier in the song. The “transgression” lyrics are a reference to [Amos 1:3](#) in the bible, in which a prophet talks about Judgement on Israel's neighbours for their sins. Similarly, Will holds both him and Cate accountable for the ruin of their relationship. The song fades out on those two lyrics intertwined.

The outro of the song is Will reading from the bible, a slightly paraphrased version of “Kings Chapter 19.” In the chapter, a prophet announced that God is coming. Three disasters occur, and people look for the lord in them, but after the last disaster, a fire, all that is left is silence. This outro connects the relationship to the idea of prophets in the song. Will and Cate felt that something like the great (like the Lord) was coming to them, but disaster after disaster proved them wrong, and all they were left with was silence.

Lyrics: [Famous Prophets \(Minds\) Lyrics](#)

Song: [Famous Prophets \(Minds\) song](#)

Track #10: Twin Fantasy (Those Boys)

6:25

The final track of the album, Twin Fantasy (Those Boys) has Will getting over his relationship with Cate. He uses a mantra-like phrase that appears often in his music “I haven’t seen the sun in so long, I forgot how much it hurts you.” The phrase in this context is about how, after leaving Cate he feels like he’s back outside in a sunnier, optimistic life, but he’s not fully ready to be on his own. The lyrics of the album explain what Will’s idea of a

“Twin Fantasy” is. A relationship he fantasises about where him and his partner are exactly alike, he wants nothing sexual, which was all Cate gave him. He just wants to be with someone exactly like him.

The whole song has an organ playing underneath just holding down chords. On top of that are Will’s regular distorted guitar, and drums. The drum track references the opening track, using the same *hit-hit-click* beat. In the middle of the song is a monologue about how Will “is finally rejoining society”, he has returned to normal, his mental health is healing, and he’s ready to get back to life. The lyrics fade out at the end singing about how when Will and Cate both come back, they’ll still both be there. This forgiveness and willingness to eventually come back as friends, along with the drum track give the album a bit of a cyclical nature. It ends similarly to how it started, Will and Cate very distanced, but this time with more hope.

Lyrics: [Twin Fantasy \(those boys\) lyrics](#)

Song: [Twin Fantasy \(those boys\) song](#)

Conclusion

The concept album telling the story of Will Toledo and Cate Wurtz, two nobodies in a small town has become a cult classic album, for many reasons. The lyrics find their way into your ears and your hearts easily. The poetic, sometimes funny lyrics strike an emotional nerve with many people. The themes on the album are things most people high school age and above can in some way relate to. The unique, lo-fi, fuzzy and noisy sound has a certain charm to some, but there is also the professionally recorded and

produced 2018 Twin Fantasy (Face-to-Face) release that has had more success among a wider audience. It has some changes to the songs and lyrics, notably to “Famous Prophets”, which got 6 more minutes of music, (bringing it to over 16). Will considers the 2018 release his complete artistic vision that he wasn’t able to do in 2011.

This album has become one of my personal faves, and one I definitely hope to have on vinyl, even though it’s quite elusive. I prefer the 2011, more fuzzy sound most of the time. For me it certainly feels more personal, especially since it was just on the heels of Will's breakup with Cate.