

A Thorough Analysis of Hayden Anhedönia's Concept Albums: *Preacher's Daughter* and *Willoughby Tucker, I'll Always Love You*.

Introduction

Curiosity can create a strange dichotomy within an individual's perspective. It allows you to view something as absolutely terrifying, yet stunningly beautiful at the same time. Like the sight of a cold-blooded piece of roadkill on the highway shoulder, brutal, yet you can't peel your eyes away. Over time, I have settled into my belief that, when viewed through the proper scope, the things we are most appalled by possess an undeniably enticing beauty. Distaste and admiration work hand in hand to reveal something profound. Hayden Anhedönia has mastered this balance and displayed it within her creation of Ethel Cain and her tragic fate.

Hayden Silas Anhedönia was born into the Southern Baptist community of Perry, Florida, to a deacon and a choir singer. Her upbringing was largely guided by the conservative, religious nature of her town. Her childhood was one of piety, and she often leaned on creative writing as an escape from reality. That is where she created the beloved Ethel Cain, which now serves as her stage name. Ethel Cain is a fictional character who mirrors similar experiences as Anhedönia, yet serves as a parallel to her, demonstrating the path she could've gone down.

Ethel Cain, born in 1970, is the daughter of a preacher at Shady Grove Baptist Church, who passed away when she was only 10 years old. Although Anhedönia has not revealed much about Ethel's childhood, the lyrics within the album suggest it was tumultuous. There are allusions to sexual abuse and struggles with addiction, on top of her grieving her father. Throughout her story, Ethel gains and loses love, abuses substances, leaves the church, runs away with strangers, romanticizes the man who kidnapped her, gets sold into prostitution, and, last but not least, gets killed and cannibalized.

Through Anhedönia's commitment to Ethel's storyline, she has created two outstanding concept albums that tell the tale of Ethel's life, love, and losses. Released in 2022, *Preacher's Daughter* details Ethel grappling with her sexuality and religious trauma. In the contents of this album, Ethel leaves her hometown, hitchhikes to California, falls in love with a man who drugs and sex trafficks her, and dies at his hands. Anhedönia's 2025 album, *Willoughby Tucker, I'll Always Love You*, serves as a prequel to *Preacher's Daughter*. Through this album, we gain insight into Ethel's relationship with her first love, Willoughby, and their breakup. The end of their relationship sets in motion the events that occur in *Preacher's Daughter*.

Anhedönia is such an outstanding artist for a multitude of reasons, but I believe her depth is the strongest of them. I view her music as a body of literature. She crafted a heartbreaking, horrific story and shaped it into one of the most beautiful, ethereal albums I have ever indulged in. The curiosity in me has dug my nails into her project, and I simply cannot draw my eyes away. After experiencing these albums

time and time again, I feel that I have seen, heard, and understood the messages that Anhedonia strove to convey through her work.

The remainder of this project will consist of a thorough, summative song-by-song analysis of both *Willoughby Tucker, I'll Always Love You* and *Preacher's Daughter*. I will analyze the albums in chronological order, beginning with *Willoughby Tucker, I'll Always Love You*, and then *Preacher's Daughter*, which contradicts the order of the two albums' release dates. This analysis is complemented by a deeper, line-by-line lyric analysis, which can be viewed [here](#). I would like to note that this analysis is written from my individual perspective and interpretation. Much of the content of these albums is unexplained and left to audience interpretation. With that being said, I hope you enjoy the products of my curiosity and allow yourself to shamelessly indulge in your own. Without further ado, here lies the story of Ethel Cain.

Willoughby Tucker, I Will Always Love You

Janie

Ethel's story begins with the depiction of her changing relationship with her best friend, Janie. Simply put, Janie is Ethel's person. Their friendship is the only positive relationship Ethel possesses. However, their relationship begins to strain when Janie gets a boyfriend at age 16, and Janie's attention is diverted from Ethel. Ethel's life is built on the foundation of failed familial relationships, religious relationships, and now friendships. She used her friendship with Janie as an escape from reality, and now that Janie has walked away from her, she is left feeling even more hurt, lonely, and angry.

Although Janie likely doesn't completely turn her back on Ethel, Ethel has learned the patterns and behaviors of people leaving her and anticipates the worst. Ethel would prefer that Janie just leave her behind completely rather than string her along in the way she currently is. Simultaneously, she begs Janie to give her access to even the smallest bit of her life, asking her to "leave open your most quiet door."

The song conveys a sad, lonely feeling, composed with a slow strumming electric guitar. During Janie, themes of desperation, relationship anxiety, loss, and familial trauma are introduced.

Willoughby's Theme

Willoughby's Theme is the first instrumental track on this album. The song begins with soft, repetitive piano. As the song progresses, a strong guitar begins to intertwine with the piano, and by the end of the song, both instruments fade out together.

After the end of Ethel's friendship with Janie, there is a massive hole in Ethel's life. This gives Willoughby Tucker an opportunity to enter Ethel's life. The weaving of the two instrumentals symbolizes Willoughby and Ethel meeting and the early stages of their relationship. As the song progresses, the instrumentals intensify, replicating the intense feelings the start of a new relationship brings on. Together, the instrumentals slowly fade out, and the song comes to a close.

Throughout the entirety of these albums, the electric guitar and piano serve as symbols of Ethel and Willoughby, respectively. The guitar has a harsher, more intense sound compared to the soft notes produced by a piano. In this track, the combination of the two instruments, in addition to the heavy use of

synth, is sonically crafted to capture the nauseating, dizzying fear and rush of falling in love and the terrifying yet exhilarating realization that, regardless of the outcome, you will be fundamentally changed as a result of it.

Fuck Me Eyes

Fuck Me Eyes narrates Ethel's feelings towards her classmate, Holly Reddick. Holly is the pretty, popular girl and is well known for appealing to the male gaze and "getting around" with the men in Shady Grove. Holly and her seductive nature makes Ethel jealous, as her insecurity leads her to believe that Willoughby will desire Holly over her.

Through Ethel's criticisms and jealousy of Holly, she begins to see her in a different light. She realizes that the side of herself that Holly presents is a facade, and she begins to sympathize with her. Holly has faced many hardships and losses in her life, and uses her sexuality and her body as a form of escapism. When Holly feels desired, she feels cared for, and her problems temporarily lessen. However, these feelings quickly fade as she realizes the men who desired her leave once they get what they want from her, leaving her to continuously repeat this toxic cycle of exploitation.

As the storyline progresses, we begin to see many parallels between Holly and Ethel. Though slightly different, Ethel begins to subject herself to the same treatment as Holly. She craves love and continues to subject herself to inadequate treatment to obtain it. This is one of the factors that ultimately leads Ethel to her unfortunate fate. Also, both characters are living double lives, attending church after their rowdy nights. They both paint themselves as proper, Christian girls while contradicting those values in their own time. This song reinforces recurring themes of jealousy and insecurity that guide the entirety of the plot.

Nettels

Nettels is a beautifully tragic love song that comments on the nature of a first love. It depicts the innocent, naive, childish behavior that people exemplify when they first begin loving another romantically. The title, Nettles, describes soft, vulnerable organisms that have evolved to be outwardly harmful for the sake of self-protection. Nettles have many healing properties, but their sting burdens them with a painful price to pay in order to feel such benefits. Nettles are symbolic of Ethel and her contradicting awareness that she is hard to love, yet deeply craves it.

This song begins with Ethel imagining Willoughby's death. Her fantasy depicts Willoughby working at a plant and being fatally harmed in an explosion, sending him to the hospital, where he doesn't survive through the night. This thought tells the listener that Ethel is already viewing Willoughby as a long-term person in her life, and also that her anxieties and worries ground her back in reality. It also enforces the recurring idea that love is not enough to protect them from the cruel world they live in.

Following Ethel's fantasy, the song delves into the relationship between her and Willoughby. Ethel warns Willoughby that nothing in her life tends to work out well and that by being in a relationship with her, he is subjecting himself to the same fate. Willoughby has to constantly ease Ethel's anxieties about the future and the state of their relationship. This anxiety grows to be a detrimental problem within their relationship. Ethel's anxieties are eased by thoughts of a safe, sound future with Willoughby. She feels that love, support, and companionship will make all of her suffering worth it.

Continuously, Ethel views love as a reward. She feels that her relationship with Willoughby is a divine gift for all of the hardship she endured in the past. This connection leads Ethel to form unhealthy perceptions of Willoughby, causing her to idolize him. She grows to fall in love with the version of him she is choosing to see. Simultaneously, Willoughby withholds his full self from Ethel, further deepening Ethel's misled understanding of him and their relationship.

This song also introduces the idea that Willoughby is afraid of growing into a person who mirrors his father. Ethel sees that he does have similar traits and tendencies as his father, despite his fear. This ties back to the recurring theme that bloodlines and legacies are inescapable.

Willoughby's Interlude

Similar to Willoughby's Theme, this instrumental track has a repetitive piano melody complemented by an electric guitar. However, these sounds are drowned out and lost among the composition of the other instruments. The relationship between Ethel and Willoughby is based on the narrative that it is an escape from the outside world. The two feel that their love is strong enough to overcome the harsh world that surrounds them, but the progressive loss of the piano and guitar, amongst other noises, symbolize that this notion is beginning to fall apart. The outside world is starting to get in, and their love is not enough to prevent the effects of it. Therefore, the fantasy that Ethel has constructed within her head is starting to unravel.

This track marks a split in the album. The tracks before this depict their relationship blossoming, being put to an unrealistic expectation, and being used as an escape from the outside world. The tracks that follow depict that exact opposite.

Dust Bowl

Dust Bowl has an eerie, nostalgic feel to it and seems to be a retelling of events throughout their relationship, as well as some of the negativities that accompany such. The latter half of the song contains a very strong, powerful, eclectic guitar. As the song ends, the guitar fades into the distance and seemingly loses itself.

The Dust Bowl was a tragedy in the 1930s to 1940s caused by a combination of drought, unsustainable farming practices, and high winds that resulted in massive, suffocating dust storms. These conditions made it practically impossible to sustain life in affected areas. The Dust Bowl serves as a metaphor for the feelings of emptiness that Ethel feels as she reflects on the decline of her relationship with Willoughby.

As Ethel begins to notice the cracks within her relationship, she begins to try to patch them, mainly with sex. Looping back to Fuck Me Eyes, Ethel begins using sex as a way to feel loved, cared for, and connected to Willoughby. Sex is serving as a temporary fix for their crumbling relationship. Throughout this song, Ethel continuously reassures herself that Willoughby chose *her* and that he loves *her*. The increased need for reassurance sheds light on the declining conditions of their relationship.

The overpowering guitar that complements the second half of the song shows Ethel taking full control of their relationship, doing whatever she can to fix it. The line that brings in the strong guitar introduces Ethel and Willoughby's use of drugs. Now, Ethel is trying to aid their relationship through sex and drugs. This line also gives us a bit more context of Willoughby's father, a drug-using war vet who has corrupted his brain.

Themes of insecurity and suicide are reinforced through this song. Additionally, this track also introduces themes of weather. Not only is bad weather Willoughby's greatest fear, but it also serves as a metaphor for the uncontrollable force of the outside world. It paints weather as an impending force that may currently seem small, but is progressively picking up quickly.

A Knock At The Door

A Knock At The Door gives us insight into who Willoughby's father was, the things he inflicted upon Willoughby, and the state of Willoughby's mental health. As previously learned, Willoughby's father is a Vietnam War veteran. He suffered from extreme trauma and PTSD, causing a major mental decline. As a result, his family, no longer feeling safe around him, sent him to a penitentiary. Unfortunately, he only faced even more of a decline, causing Ethel to equate him with Satan.

The phrase "a knock at the door" is a symbol of death. Willoughby is not afraid of death showing up on his doorstep, and even seems eager to let it in and face it. This refers to Willoughby's apathy towards his father, but also to Willoughby facing his own death. Willoughby's view of death is contrasted with Ethel's. After all the suffering he endured at his father's hands, Willoughby is indifferent to his father's death, yet Ethel is desperately longing for the love of a male figure like her father, despite the abuse she faced.

Throughout this song, Ethel continues to idolize Willoughby, believing she knows him better than she does. Her saying she would know him by his knock at the door means that she feels she knows him inside and out. As the song comes to a close, Ethel begins to question Willoughby's strength and security, and her view of him as a pillar in her life begins to waver.

Radio Towers

Sonically, Radio Towers, the final instrumental track of this album, is composed primarily of piano, with the addition of a quiet, rhythmic beeping mimicking the sounds of a heart monitor in a hospital. Following the idea that the piano represents Willoughby, the slow, droning, unchanging pattern of it seems to signify that he is letting life pass him by.

There are multiple other instruments that make appearances throughout the song, but do not stick around for long. This could represent different people and relationships passing through Willoughby's life. Whether it is parental, friendships, or romances, everything lacks permanence.

Tempest

Tempest is the only song on the album that is written from Willoughby's perspective. Tempest, by definition, is a violent, windy storm. As we learned in Dust Bowl, bad weather is Willoughby's greatest fear. In the case of this song, the tempest represents both a strong physical storm and a strong emotional storm.

Willoughby is the first to recognize the impending storm, relating the sound to that of a train. At this point in the narrative, the two are unable to escape what they have been hiding from within the comforts of their relationship, and it is now coming in full force. Willoughby is angry at the existence of these outside forces and also that Ethel has tried to prolong them for so long. He begins to question if Ethel is using her trauma as a way to beg for pity, sympathy, and saving, showing how his feelings towards her have shifted through their relationship.

Ethel's failure to truly see Willoughby mirrors the behavior he witnessed in his mother, who left him with the dangers of his father years prior, and draws the same conclusion with Ethel. He begs to "go home", but it is clear that he has never truly had a home in his past. Instead of returning to a specific place, Willoughby wishes for death, believing he will find home in the afterlife or lack thereof.

This track provides a lot of insight into Willoughby's mental state and the suicidal thoughts he is having. It is clear he is struggling, and this is the climax, or tempest, of his suffering. It is something that has grown too strong to run from. Eventually, the lyrics fade, representing Willoughby giving in to his mental battle, and also the presence of the physical storm. The fate of Willoughby is left ambiguous. It is possible that he died as a result of the storm, became separated from the town, and took it as an opportunity to begin again, or took his own life.

Waco, Texas

Waco, Texas brings the perspective back to Ethel and concludes this album. The primary instrument of this track is the electric guitar, signifying that Ethel is all alone again. Ethel acknowledges the facade that Willoughby puts on when he is with her, trying to be strong for her. Even at this point, Ethel continues to idolize Willoughby and their relationship whilst reflecting on it. She views the end of it as a very sudden happening, still unable to grasp the ways her behavior impacted him.

Ethel acknowledges that their relationship will greatly impact her, likely for the rest of her life. She felt she was in control of their relationship and could change and fix it in any way she saw fit. Now, she looks back and realizes that these actions hurt him and pushed him away, just as she feared she would. Finally, she realizes that she never truly knew Willoughby, only seeing the parts of him she wanted to. Still, she is holding him on this pedestal, saying she would still do anything for him, and that she would "rather die than be anything but [his] girl."

As the song wraps up, Ethel reflects on how she felt this relationship would save her, but now, she is right back where she started and even more hurt. Finally, she admits to herself that it was never as good as she thought it was. Despite her realizations, the return of the gentle piano symbolizes that she will continue to hope that Willoughby will come back and they can try again. This reinforces that this relationship, and love as a whole, will be a driving force in the future of her life and the next album.

Preacher's Daughter

Family Tree (Intro)

Family Tree Intro sets up major themes that will be explored throughout the entirety of *Preacher's Daughter*. At the beginning of the track, there is a muffled sermon discussing the importance of mothers in regard to religion. This introduces the theme of suffering that women of faith endure. The track also dives into the theme of intergenerational trauma. Through this album, Ethel continuously tries to escape from her bloodline and the pain she has faced as a result of it. Ethel believes that her fate is inherently corrupted due to her lineage. Foreshadowing is a strong literary device used within this track and the entirety of the album.

American Teenager

American Teenager has an intentional, nostalgic, small-town feel to it. The town holds very traditional values, aligning with the American Dream. The way the town is spoken about makes it seem comforting and simultaneously off or disturbing. Violent events receive pointed blame or are quickly brushed off.

Ethel partakes in the traditional “American teenager” activities, but feels empty and lonely while doing so. She begins to see the facade of the American dream fading away, while those around her continue to delight in it. This differing view, along with the death of her father and her breakup with Willoughby, makes Ethel feel extremely lonely and out of place.

Through this song, we gain insight into some of Ethel's unhealthy behaviors, such as downplaying her feelings and experiences, seeking sincerity through violence, and staying even when she realizes something is not serving her. We also learn of her alcohol abuse, which, presumably, was taken up as a way to cope with her breakup. Despite her substance use, she continues to attend church, masking her struggles to try to please her late father and her community. During this time, Ethel grows increasingly more distant from her faith. She questions her connection with God, Christ, and the religious community surrounding her. Her uncertainty in her faith is a driving force of change throughout this album.

A House In Nebraska

A House In Nebraska encapsulates Ethel's heartbreak and range of emotions following the end of her relationship with Willoughby. Through *Willoughby Tucker, I'll Always Love You*, we witness the entirety of their relationship. This song, which takes place a duration of time after the two have broken up, shows how their relationship is still heavily impacting Ethel, just as she expected it would.

Even after their split, Ethel is fantasizing about the potential she believed their relationship held. She reflects on the quiet, mundane moments they shared. Since Ethel's past is one that was filled with trouble and chaos, these simple moments are where she was able to soften and let herself fall in love. Despite the mess that still ensued around them, Ethel and Willoughby had one another, and to Ethel, that was more than enough. Ethel viewed Willoughby as her everything, then (from her perspective) he was suddenly gone, leaving her with nothing. Ethel continues to yearn for Willoughby's love, believing that she is still his rightful lover, regardless of their separation.

She imagines a “house in Nebraska” that the two would share, serving as an escape from their past. The house would allow them to create a new life for themselves, where love and comfort would be prioritized. In this house, the two would fall deeper and deeper in love, and even go on to create a family of their own. They would be free from perceptions of their community and be granted the opportunity to begin again. However, this idea exists merely as a fantasy of Ethel's. She is still stuck in her reality in Shady Grove, and now she doesn't even have Willoughby. This house exists as a continuous metaphor throughout the album.

Through her reflection, she feels an intense, deep loneliness. She recalls all the places and things they once experienced together, and realizes that she now stands alone. She hurts knowing that it was her actions that pushed Willoughby away, and that she is the reason he will never return to her or their relationship. Regardless of her awareness of her fault, she still hopes and prays that he will come back to her. Through her grief, Ethel continues to abuse alcohol, making her emotions even stronger.

The track begins with a heavy piano melody. The lyrics are repetitive, mirroring the constant, repetitive nature of her loneliness and grief. As the song nears the end, a strong electric guitar solo takes over. The intense guitar reflects the strength and intensity of Ethel's emotions.

Western Nights

Western Nights shifts the perspective of the album from a reflection of the past to happenings of the present. In this track, we are introduced to Ethel's new lover, Logan Phelps. Logan is involved in many crimes, mostly consisting of bank robberies. Here, we witness Ethel's ability to see the best in people being pushed to an unhealthy extent. She is willing to look past the dangers Logan presents because he is beautiful, rides a motorcycle, and claims he loves her.

Logan is a violent man. He often gets into bar fights and even physically abuses Ethel. He says he loves Ethel, but his actions say otherwise. This discrepancy reaffirms Ethel's belief that love and violence go hand in hand. Because this is the only type of love she has ever been shown, she believes Logan loves her and grows even more loyal to him, declaring that he will never escape her love. Ethel views her relationship with Logan as a way to escape her current reality, causing her to cling to him even harder.

Ethel constantly cries and claims they are tears of joy. After doing this multiple times, she is able to convince herself that this is the truth. This, in addition to the emotional confusion caused by Logan, is extremely damaging to her psyche. She can no longer differentiate what is safe from what is not. This becomes a detrimental factor moving forward in her story.

Family Tree

Ethel and Logan's relationship comes to a sudden end when Logan is caught after a bank robbery and fatally shot by the police. Ethel, who served as an accomplice to multiple of his crimes, is scared of her fate and decides she has to leave town. This breaks the final connection Ethel has to Shady Grove, finally pushing her to escape from her hometown.

As she flees the scene, she envisions this as an opportunity to begin again. Ethel views this as Salvation, believing that God is allowing her to be washed clean of her sins. The metaphor of the noose introduced in Family Tree (Intro) is reinvented. Ethel has removed the noose from her neck, no longer letting it keep her captive, and now can use it for her own desires. This idea reiterates that Ethel isn't put off by violence; in fact, she is even willing to use it to her advantage.

Sonically, this song is defined by the strength and power provided by the vocals and instrumentals. The vocals within this track are intense and have an angry sound to them. The electric guitar takes control of the track as it comes to an end, representing the way Ethel intends to take control of her own life.

Hard Times

In Hard Times, we lose the intensity of the previous song and dive into a much slower, melancholic track. Here, we jump back to the past again as Ethel processes the abuse she faced from her father. In addition to the religious trauma Ethel endured, she was also sexually abused by her father, a preacher at her town's church. Her father was a highly respected and idolized man within their community. Because of the position of power he held and the stigma of shame regarding sex and sexual abuse within religion, Ethel felt uncomfortable speaking out about her father's actions.

Ethel recognizes that the abuse she endured is wrong, yet tries to maintain a positive view of her father. She fantasizes about a reality in which he is a good man and father. She hates the fact that his actions stripped her of her youth and happiness, despite her believing she was doing the right thing by not exposing him. Even now, Ethel looks up to her father, shamefully praying she will grow into somebody who resembles him. This desire makes her feel guilty and scared for her future.

Ethel feels tied to her father and the abuse he inflicted upon her. Her father took a part of her, and now, in theory, they share that, bonding them together. He feels like a looming presence in her life. Even though he isn't there, the impact of what he did will stay with her forever. Both currently and in the past, Ethel is exhausted by the emotional weight of what she endured, leaving her wishing yet unable to move on.

This track is filled with lyrics that depict child-like behaviors and actions while regarding mature themes of abuse, trauma, and internal emotional conflict. This contradiction works to develop the idea that the hardships Ethel faced at a young age forced her to mature quickly. This is a recurring theme and cause of conflict throughout the entirety of her life.

Thoroughfare

Thoroughfare introduces a new character into Ethel's life who will grow to be very influential. At this point, she has made it far from her hometown into rural Texas. She has nothing and nobody, until Isaiah comes along. He pulls over and tells Ethel he will take her wherever she desires. Initially, she is hesitant, but then agrees, believing she has nothing left to lose. In Isaiah's pickup truck, Ethel starts getting to know him and discovers that he's headed to California in hopes of finding love. Ethel agrees to venture with him all the way there if he believes it is what he needs. Again, we see Ethel prioritizing the needs of others over her own.

As the two make their way across the country, Ethel begins to see Isaiah in a different light. She viewed him as a calm, stable, leading man, and quickly began falling in love with him. The two started to grow more infatuated with one another and became sexually involved. Finally, the pair reached their final destination of California. That's when Isaiah confessed his feelings to Ethel, who heavily reciprocated them. Contrary to her claim that love is not something important to her, Ethel abandons her mission of finding herself to stay with Isaiah. Together, the couple heads to Isaiah's residence, prepared to fall deeper in love.

This is the only track on the album that has a southern sound to it, reflecting their geographical location as they venture across the South. The closing half of the song is complemented by a scat breakdown, which is used to depict the sexual relationship Ethel and Isaiah are building together. As we move forward in the album, it becomes clear that their relationship is rooted in the foundation of sexual connection.

Gibson Girl

Gibson Girl marks the turning point of this album. The hopeful promises of Ethel's position start to fade and reveal an impending dark fate. As Ethel and Isaiah's relationship develops, it quickly turns abusive and unsafe. Isaiah begins feeding Ethel various drugs, distorting her reality. Whilst in her impaired state, Isaiah begins prostituting Ethel. Because of the drugs she is being given, she is unable to defend herself or grasp the reality of what is happening to her.

Throughout her exploitation, Ethel is continuously gaslighted by Isaiah. He uses her exploration of her sexuality against her, arguing that if she finds pleasure in this, it isn't wrong. He works to convince her that this is her own desire, not something he is forcing her into. Ethel feels a sort of power in her exploitation, believing that this is an act of rebellion against her family and the expectations her community placed upon her.

Despite the love Isaiah claims to possess for Ethel, he continuously puts her in a position where she is physically, psychologically, and sexually abused. Ethel notes this, but believes that he will eventually realize how cruel the situation is and stop. However, Isaiah, motivated by greed and addiction, has no desire to change his ways. He has developed a cycle of using the money gained from prostituting Ethel to buy more drugs, worsening his addiction, and continuing to drug and exploit Ethel.

This track is primarily composed of eclectic guitar. Sonically, it has an alluring, sultry sound, but the distorted vocals and the dark lyrics give it a disturbing presence. The song starts slow and hazy, mirroring Ethel's helplessness and loss of control. The intensity builds as the song progresses, aside from one verse where Ethel questions Isaiah's feelings towards her. Building on her history of naivety, she chooses to ignore her uncertainty. The track concludes with fast, repetitive lyrics, symbolizing the conditions of her exploitation. Quickly coming to an end, the remainder of the song is filled with hushed droning, flies buzzing, and the gentle hum of an old freezer.

Ptolemaea

The title Ptolemaea is a reference to Dante's *Inferno*, describing a ring in the ninth circle of hell, Ptolemy. Ptolemy is reserved for punishing those who have betrayed their guests. Dante says that within this ring, individuals' living bodies are possessed by demons, and their souls are bound to hell.

Ptolemaea begins with Isaiah, on drugs and possessed by the devil, approaching Ethel, who is still drugged and hallucinating. Under demonic control, Isaiah explains to Ethel that he had already invited her to join him twice; once to see the west, and again to his residence in California. He goes on to criticize Ethel's faith, contrasting her love of blood in a religious regard to his literal love for it.

Distorted buzzing and cries can be heard behind Isaiah's demonic chant, where he claims he loves her, needs her, and will give her to the higher power he is submitting to. He instructs her that it is in her best interest to obey him. Ethel begins to realize that Isaiah's intent is to sacrifice her. She accepts that in her impaired state, there is nothing she can do to stop her fate. She is secluded, across the country from anyone who may try to help her. Isaiah affirms that she is helpless, like a sacrificial lamb. Ethel begs him to look away from her and demands that he tell her what he's done. He begins to advance, and Ethel cries out for divine intervention, begging God to make this stop. Her futile pleas build until she lets out a blood-curdling shriek.

The song progresses with heavy instrumentals drowning out faint screams. The lyrics continue, explaining that throughout her life, Ethel faced violence and rage from those who claim to love her. The track advances with a distorted, demonic monologue spoken from the perspective of Isaiah. It comments on themes of intergenerational trauma, violence, and suffering caused by religion. Isaiah reveals that from the beginning, Ethel was promised to him by the will of God personified within her father. Ptolemaea closes with the voice of Death. It speaks through Isaiah, stating that nobody, including Ethel, can escape its inevitability.

August Underground

August Underground is the first instrumental track on this record. This song is filled with distortion, aching cries, and eerie instrumentals. The lack of lyrics shows that, within her final minutes, Ethel is muted by the slow, painful death she is enduring. As the volume of the instrumentals lowers, Isaiah can be heard walking away from Ethel's dead body. This song marks the official death of Ethel Cain.

Televangelism

Televangelism is the second and final instrumental track on Preacher's Daughter. This song begins with gentle piano notes and soft, ambient noise. As the song progresses, the piano and soft, angelic vocals develop into a tranquil, ethereal sound. Slowly, the piano grows slow and distorted as Ethel ascends from her body into Heaven.

Sun Bleached Flies

The gentle piano heard in Televangelism continues into Sun Bleached Flies. At this point, Ethel is in Heaven and reflecting on the life she has lived. While she recalls her experiences, faith, family, and lovers, she expresses a longing to return to her past while also acknowledging the pain she endured as a result of those conditions. She yearns to return to her hometown church while accepting that neither her faith nor God's will was enough to save her from her tragic fate.

As the song progresses, Ethel continues to process the events of her life, her relationships, and the expectations placed upon her. Throughout her life, her father, lovers, and community expected Ethel to be a paragon of a Christian woman, being a pillar of support for men, exuding perfect morals, and remaining chaste and loyal. The pressure she faced as a result pushed her to her breaking point, ultimately leading her to her current position. It also made her refrain from experiencing her life wholly, leaving her unsatisfied.

Ethel recounts that within her final moments, the realization that no one would save her began to set in. Despite her acceptance, Ethel turned her attention back to her connection with God. Endlessly, she prayed, believing that His plan was the correct path for her and affirming her faith and devotion to God. She reflects on the generational trauma she fell victim to and forgives her parents and their ancestors for the cycle they created and indulged in. Ethel's death ended her family's bloodline, putting an end to the cyclic trauma she endured and preventing it from impacting anyone else.

As the song comes to a close, Ethel thinks back to her relationship with Willoughby. Still, after everything she experienced, Ethel is dreaming of her future with Willoughby. She fantasizes about their house in Nebraska and the peace that would come as a result of their love. She acknowledges the fractured state of their relationship, but can't help wanting to return to him.

Strangers

Strangers is the closing track of this album and, chronologically, the last song detailing the life of Ethel Cain. Through this track, lots of insight into what happened after Ethel's death is gained. The song begins with a hushed recording of a sermon expressing that death is an inevitability; we all must face it. It continues to explain that within the Bible, a better place is promised to those who believe in the Lord. The sermon ends, and the song transitions back to Ethel's point of view.

Ethel, speaking from the afterlife, depicts the fate of her body. The use of double meanings within this song is extremely prevalent and telling. After Ethel's death, Isaiah moved her body into a freezer. This allowed him to preserve her body and store it for consumption. He continuously revisits her frozen body and cannibalizes her.

Ethel, even in death, worries that she is not enough for him. She worries that the meat of her body is too tough or inadequate. Repeatedly, she thinks that her body isn't good enough for Isaiah, highlighting how deeply her desire to appeal to men has infiltrated her psyche. She reflects on how all of this stemmed from the desire to be his lover, and she still begs for that fate to be true.

The bridge consists of Ethel repetitively asking if she is making Isaiah "feel sick." After Isaiah cannibalized her, Ethel is concerned that her body is making him physically sick. Even after his cruelty, Ethel worries for him and hopes that he doesn't suffer as a result of her. This lyric also serves as Ethel questioning if his actions are making him feel psychologically sick. Isaiah, whose mental health was already declining, has reached a point of genuine insanity. His murder and cannibalization of Ethel reflect the state of his psyche. Ethel is asking if, now, after his actions, he is beginning to recognize his psychotic behavior and feel disgusted by what he has done.

Ethel worries about how her mom will get on knowing that her daughter is missing. She worries that her mother's anxiety and fear regarding Ethel will be a burden throughout the remainder of her life. As the song comes to a close, Ethel acknowledges her mother directly. She tells her mother that she has made it to Heaven and holds no resentment toward her for the way she behaved while she was grieving. She begs her not to worry or think about Ethel too much for her own good. The song closes with Ethel telling her mother that she loves her and will see her when she gets to Heaven.

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