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### Close Reading and Rhetorical Analysis of Taylor Swift's Anti-Hero

| Excerpted Lyrics                                         | Guiding Questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Your Notes & Analysis |
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| I have this thing where I get older but just never wiser | <p>In the first line, we are introduced to the speaker for the first time — And the personal pronoun “I” is used <i>twice</i> to make this clear. What is already revealed about the speaker? What might already be inferred? What do we learn at the onset of the argument?</p> <p>The speaker opens with the phrase, “I have this thing.” <i>Why?</i> What might be some more formal alternatives to phrase this — and, why might the speaker have selected this particular phrasing? What’s the effect on the tone at the commencement of the argument?</p> <p>The speaker uses “but” instead of other possibilities, such as “and.” Why? What does this imply? In the same line of thought, why might the speaker juxtapose “older” with “never wiser”?...? What’s the intended effect?</p> <p>What might be <i>ironic</i> about this opening line? (...Is the observation that’s being made in this line a wise one?) If there is irony present here, what effect does it have on the argument?</p> |                       |
| Midnights become my afternoons                           | <p>Begin by unpacking the speaker’s meaning here. (What does it mean for midnights to become her afternoons?)</p> <p>After unpacking the denotation about the speaker’s waking hours, analyze the connotation. What might be inferred from this line? What else might this reveal about the speaker?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                       |
| When my depression works the graveyard shift             | <p>In what way does this line provide additional context for the previous one, in terms of <i>why</i> her midnights might become her afternoons? (Can you say explicitly what the speaker is saying in abstract terms?)</p> <p>Closely read and analyze the speaker’s choice of the word “works.” (Why is it interesting for her depression to <b>work</b> the graveyard shift? Why doesn’t it “take” the graveyard shift, or “picks up” the graveyard shift? How do the nuances between these alternatives impact the meaning of the line?)</p> <p>We see a repetition of “my.” Why? What’s implied by the repetition of my and I?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                       |

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| <p>All of the people I've ghosted<br/>stand there in the room</p> | <p>The speaker has crafted a lovely extended metaphor that comes to fruition here. The most prominent ideas and images in the last two lines are “depression,” “graveyard shift,” and people that have been “ghosted.” What are the multiple layers of meaning that might be present here?</p> <p>The speaker uses the word “ghosted,” which was not widely used in the English language until recently (within five years of this song being written). Why does she choose this word, as opposed to other alternatives? What might that imply about the <i>speaker</i>, and about her intended <i>audience</i>...?</p> |  |
| <p>I should not be left to my own<br/>devices</p>                 | <p>By using the phrase “I <u>should</u> not,” what does the speaker imply?</p> <p>Consider the general meaning of this line, and analyze what else it reveals about the speaker. (Is there irony in this line, too? Is this evidence of intelligent, problematic, or hyperbolic self-awareness?)</p> <p>Originally, the phrase “left to one’s own devices” was equivalent to being left unsupervised — and the word “devices” was more or less synonymous with “desires.” Today, the word “devices” has taken on a new meaning; how might that contribute to a multifaceted meaning in this line?</p>                   |  |
| <p>They come with prices and vices<br/>I end up in crises</p>     | <p>The speaker utilizes rhyme in a concentrated way here — four rhymes in rapid succession: devices, prices, vices, crises. Why this device? What effect do these rhymed words have that aren’t offered by alternatives (like “costs” instead of “prices”)...?</p> <p>The speaker is still speaking in fairly vague terms here. We don’t know exactly what the “devices” are, nor do we know what the “prices” or “vices” are. Why might this have been intentionally kept broad and undefined? What’s the effect?</p>                                                                                                  |  |
| <p>Tale as old as time</p>                                        | <p>Here, we see another idiomatic expression. Consider why the speaker might have used this particular phrase, as opposed to alternatives with a similar meaning, e.g. “We’ve all seen this before.”</p> <p>(Notably, Disney’s <i>Beauty and the Beast</i> features a major song titled “Tale as Old as Time” — and the Beast <u>is an anti-hero</u>!)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |

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| <p>I wake up screaming from<br/>dreaming one day I'll watch as<br/>you're leaving 'cause you got<br/>tired of my scheming for the last<br/>time</p> | <p>Again, the speaker offers a rapid sequences of rhymes: screaming, dreaming, leaving, scheming. Why? What's the intended effect?</p> <p>What does the substance of this rapid rhyming sequence reveal about the speaker? And, perhaps even more importantly, what does it reveal about the target audience? (This is the first time we see a “<b>you</b>” in the argument! What have we learned? Who is she addressing? What is their relationship? What's going on here?)</p> <p>The speaker ends this phrasing with the words “for the last time.” What might this imply?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |
| <p>It's me<br/>Hi!<br/>I'm the problem, it's me</p>                                                                                                 | <p>This is the recurring line that marks the beginning of the chorus — but, notably, this is not the song title. The song could have been titled “It's Me” — but, obviously, it's not. Why? How does this particular line <i>inform</i> the title of the song, “Anti-Hero”...?</p> <p>Why does the speaker open with, “It's me”...? What would this mean or imply if that were the entire line? (“It's me” brings to mind the popular phrasing, “It's not you, it's me.” Why might this be deliberate? And yet, why does the speaker phrase it <i>this way</i>, keeping the “you” out of it? What might that reveal about the speaker?)</p> <p>Why does the speaker say “Hi!”...? What's the effect of this abrupt, almost enthusiastic “Hi!” in the middle of an otherwise negative cloud of self-criticism? (What purpose is served by that intentional point of contrast? Is it ironic — and, if so, what's the intended effect on the audience?)</p> <p>When the speaker states “I'm the problem, it's me,” what does she mean? (Is she being self deprecating? Is she being literal or sarcastic? Is it possible that this is intentionally vague, and left up to the audience to decide? If so, what insight does this reveal about the speaker, her relationship with the audience, and the overall message here?)</p> <p>Why does the speaker bookend the phrase, “Hi! I'm the problem,” with the same two words: “It's me”...? Consider the effect of the repetition, as well as the placement of “It's me” at both the beginning and the end of the line. (Does make the line feel more literal or sarcastic? Either? Both? Explain!)</p> |  |

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| <p>At teatime<br/>Everybody agrees</p>                            | <p>The speaker reaches back to the beginning of her argument and extends the metaphor she opened with (“midnights become my afternoons”) when she references “teatime.” (Teatime typically occurs, you guessed it, in the late afternoon.) Why? What effect does this extended metaphor have on the argument? (Does it make it seem more true? Does the argument feel more robust and thoughtful, simply because of this reference?)</p> <p>Closely read this line. Who is “everybody,” and what are they agreeing on? Further, what does this line reveal about the speaker, audience, and message?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |  |
| <p>I'll stare directly at the sun but<br/>never in the mirror</p> | <p>This is another metaphor. First, unpack it — articulate, in your own words, what the speaker <i>means</i>. (What is and isn't she willing or able to do? What's the criticism here? Is it, once again, self-deprecating? Is it <i>her</i> voice, or is she simply echoing a criticism of herself that has been voiced by others?)</p> <p>What's the intended effect of using this kind of symbolism, as opposed to saying what she means more concretely? (Why isn't the speaker more literal? Why doesn't she just say what she means here? What's the impact of this symbolic language on the overall argument?)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  |
| <p>It must be exhausting always<br/>rooting for the anti-hero</p> | <p>To better understand this line, first consider <u>who</u> the speaker is addressing here. Who is the person she is suggesting must be exhausted? Is it her critics? Her fans? Her self? A romantic partner (a person who might be leaving because they got tired of her scheming)? Any or all of the above?</p> <p>What is an anti-hero? (Some famous examples from modern television include Tony Soprano and Walter White. Some famous examples from Disney movies include Beast and Maui. And, one of the most beloved anti-heroes of all-time is Snape.)</p> <p>Why might the speaker associate herself with this character-type, based on what we've learned in the argument so far? And, who is doing the “rooting”...? How might you rephrase this in clearer, simpler, or more concrete terms?</p> <p>Why might it be exhausting to root for an anti-hero?</p> |  |

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| <p>Sometimes I feel like everybody<br/>is a sexy baby<br/>And I'm a monster on the hill</p>                                   | <p>The words “I feel” are notable in this line, because they bring an element of <u>perception</u> into the argument. What’s the difference between this line with, and without, the “Sometimes I feel like”...?</p> <p>What’s the difference between <i>being</i> an anti-hero, and <i>feeling like</i> an anti-hero? For the sake of this argument, which seems to ring more true of the speaker? Why?</p> <p>What does this line reveal about the speaker? How does it contribute to the message?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| <p>Too big to hang out, slowly<br/>lurching toward your favorite<br/>city, pierced through the heart<br/>but never killed</p> | <p>The speaker extends the “monster on the hill” metaphor in a manner that’s almost comical, as she describes herself in a horrifying way that resembles King Kong or Godzilla (“lurching toward your favorite city”), yet still wanting and tragically being unable to “hang out.” What’s the intended effect of this device? How does it work to strengthen the speaker’s argument?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |
| <p>Did you hear my covert<br/>narcissism I might disguise as<br/>altruism like some kind of<br/>congressman</p>               | <p>Who is the “you”...?</p> <p>What is “covert narcissism”...? What does she imply by using that particular phrase, and by asking the question of whether or not it was heard?</p> <p>Is this an anti-heroic quality? And, is the speaker truly attributing this quality to herself — or is she speaking sarcastically here?</p> <p>Consider how your answer to the questions above could have implications for how the entire argument might be interpreted. What is the speaker’s <u>message</u>? (What is she actually saying here?) And, further, what is the speaker’s <u>purpose</u>? (Why is she saying it? What’s her motive? What does she hope that this song, or argument, will accomplish?)</p> <p>The speaker offers a simile, comparing herself to “some kind of congressman.” Why? (Why a simile and not a metaphor? What’s the connotation offered by “some kind of congressman”...? What’s the intended effect on the audience, and on the argument? Does the speaker expect this simile to resound with listeners and to seem reasonable — or, is it crafted in a manner that might seem ridiculous?)</p> |  |
| <p>Tale as old as time</p>                                                                                                    | <p>This line repeats, but in a new context! Why? What does this repetition offer the argument?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |

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| <p>One day I'll watch as you're leaving and life will lose all its meaning for the last time</p> | <p>The speaker refers to “you” again, but this time, does not present the information in the context of a dream. Why this shift from “I dreamed” to “One day”...? What do both of those frames suggest about the speaker and the overarching argument? In a sense, does this suggest that dreams really do come true?</p> <p>Extend the above analysis. How much of this is about perception? About interpretation? About the projection of subjective or hypothetical ideas?</p> <p>Closely read and analyze the specific word choice in these lines. (Why the passive “watch” and not something more active like “protest”...? Why “leaving” and not “bailing” or “running out”...?)</p> <p>The last portion of this line can be considered hyperbole (that “life will lose all its meaning”). What effect does hyperbole have on the message? Does it drive the point home and make it ring more true? Does it create a sense of sarcasm?</p> <p>What can we infer from the words, “for the last time”...? What might it even mean for life to “lose all its meaning” multiple times?</p> |  |
| <p>It's me<br/>Hi!<br/>I'm the problem, it's me</p>                                              | <p>The speaker returns to the recurring chorus. Is there anything you notice about these lines now that you didn't notice earlier? Has their meaning somehow evolved by the context of the verse?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |  |
| <p>I have this dream my daughter-in-law kills me for the money</p>                               | <p>The speaker returns to a device that was used earlier — using a personal anecdote about a dream as a vehicle for a message. This is especially interesting because the argument begins by pointing out that “midnights” became the speaker’s “afternoons.” The first time a dream was cited, she woke up “screaming from dreaming one day I’ll watch as you’re leaving ‘cause you got tired of my scheming for the last time.” This time, the dream is more violent — she dreams that she has been murdered by a family member for her money. What’s the intended effect of this line?</p> <p>(Is this intended to be a true dream and manifestation of a fear, or an absurd personal anecdote? Is this intended to evoke empathetic feelings in the audience, or to elicit a smirk and a laugh?)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |  |

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| <p>She thinks I left them in the will</p>                                                                         | <p>What is implied by the word “thinks”...? And, who is “them”...?</p> <p>Is this line intended to be ironic? Humorous? Tragic? Unpack the line’s multifaceted effect.</p> <p>How does this line, and the previous line, contribute to the elements of argument you have been unpacking all along: the speaker, the audience, the message, and the overall argument?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |
| <p>The family gathers 'round and reads it, and then someone screams out: "She's laughing up at us from hell!"</p> | <p>The speaker infuses the argument with what feels like a vivid and dark memory here — but it’s fabricated, only the alleged recollection of a dream. In what way is the speaker using this device to enhance her argument? What effect does this anecdote likely have on the audience?</p> <p>The speaker uses dialogue for the first and only time in this argument. Why? What’s the effect? Then, take this further and analyze the actual language in the dialogue. (Why these words? Why is she laughing? What’s the effect of the speaker projecting a scenario where her family members murder her and declare she is in hell? Again, is this intended to be funny, or tragic, or something else entirely?)</p> <p>Consider the scene that the speaker offers in this dream. Did she “win” by not including her murderous family members in the will? In what ways might this be considered an anti-heroic anecdote? How does this “proof” of anti-heroism contribute to the argument? To the speaker’s ethos?</p> |  |
| <p>It's me<br/>Hi!<br/>I'm the problem, it's me</p>                                                               | <p>This line recurs more than any other in the argument. When considered in different contexts, and when spoken with different inflections and tones, the meaning of these words can shift — from sad and self-deprecating to sarcastic and fierce, to deeply reflective from forces of social pressure. How many different ways can you read or interpret these words? What’s the intended rhetorical impact of offering the same lines with an ambiguous or evolving, interpretive meaning?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |

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### Deconstructing the General Argument in Taylor Swift's Anti-Hero

Now that you've closely read and analyzed Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero," take some time to consider the argument as a whole. (You've unpacked interesting ways that she uses language, rhetorical devices, subtle double-meanings, and so on... but what's their purpose? What's the unified argument that every one of those lyrics is contributing to?) Use the graphic organizer below to map out your analysis.

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| <p>What do you know about the speaker? What insights have been revealed, and which <i>specific</i> moments in the text reveal them?</p> <p>How do these understandings about the speaker contribute to the strength of the argument?</p> | <p>What do you know about the audience? (Are there multiple facets to this audience, or multiple audiences?) What has been revealed about the audience's relationship to the speaker? Use textual evidence to substantiate your claims.</p> <p>How do these understandings about the audience contribute to the strength of the argument?</p> | <p>What is the <b>message</b> that the speaker is trying to convey here? (Don't confuse "message" with "purpose." The question here is "<u>what is she saying?</u>" ...which is different than, "why is she saying it?"</p> <p>Explore the relationship between this message and (1) the speaker, and (2) the audience.</p> |
| <p>In what ways, if any, does the speaker appeal to <b>ethos</b>? (How might she try to foster <u>credibility</u> – so that the audience values, respects, or believes what she says?)</p>                                               | <p>In what ways, if any, does the speaker appeal to <b>pathos</b>? (How might she try to purposefully evoke emotions from the audience? Which emotions are evoked – how and why?)</p>                                                                                                                                                         | <p>In what ways, if any, does the speaker appeal to <b>logos</b>? (How does she construct, or give the appearance of constructing, a <b>logical</b>, rational progression of ideas?)</p>                                                                                                                                    |
| <p>What is this argument's <b>purpose</b>? (Why is the speaker delivering THAT message to THAT audience? What is her motive? What might she be trying to accomplish through this argument?)</p>                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>Is this argument <b>effective</b>? Where is it most effective, and what makes those moments so strong? Where is it least effective, and how might those moments be improved? Use textual evidence to support your ideas!</p>                                                                                             |



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### Extending Taylor Swift's Argument BEYOND Anti-Hero

Now that you've closely read and analyzed Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero," consider how the following information further amplifies, diminishes, influences, or transforms the argument developed throughout the song.

| Additional Layer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Your Analysis & Notes |
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| <p>In the music video, the speaker opens the front door to her home, and she (another version of the speaker) appears. This happens at the chorus as they exchange the lines, "It's me" / "Hi" / "I'm the problem, it's me."</p>  <p>How might this representation of the speaker speaking-to-herself impact the argument?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                       |
| <p>After releasing the song and music video, Taylor Swift published a short (15 second) video in which she prompts viewers to share their anti-heroic qualities on social media.</p> <p>She writes:</p> <p>“🐱 Join my #TSAntiHeroChallenge and share your anti-heroic traits.”</p> <p>In the short clip, the line, “It’s me, hi, I’m the problem it’s me” repeats twice. During “It’s me, hi,” she appears on camera. During “I’m the problem it’s me,” her cat appears in a baby carrier with the caption, “<b>Thinks her cat is her son.</b>”</p> <p>How does this inform the overall argument? (Do the lyrics celebrate anti-heroic qualities? Does the #TSAntiHeroChallenge?)</p> |                       |
| <p>In an interview about “Anti-Hero,” Taylor Swift explains that “This song really is a guided tour throughout all the things I tend to hate about myself. We all hate things about ourselves and it’s all of those aspects of the things we dislike and like about ourselves that we have to come to terms with if we’re going to ‘be this person.’”</p> <p>How does this information from Taylor Swift inform the overall argument? (Is it consistent with your analysis? Does it amplify or diminish the core argument? Unpack this!)</p>                                                                                                                                          |                       |

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Comparing & Contrasting Taylor Swift’s Anti-Hero

In many ways, Taylor Swift’s song “Anti-Hero” might be considered an argument about **insecurity**. This, of course, is not an uncommon theme in popular culture and society at large. So here’s what you’re going to do next:

**First**, identify another song of your choice that is thematically similar (related to **insecurity**). It’s important that the song you choose offers a rich and comparable argument to Taylor Swift’s “Anti-Hero.” Examples include:

- “Unpretty” by TLC
- “Don’t Let Me Get Me” by Pink
- “Stressed Out” by Twenty One Pilots
- “Victoria’s Secret” by Jax

**Then**, closely read and analyze your selected text before **comparing and contrasting** with Taylor Swift’s argument. Your comparison should focus on **rhetoric** (e.g. compare and contrast speakers, audiences, messages, and purposes... compare appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos... compare the use of rhetorical devices and choice of language...). Be thorough and thoughtful in your comparison and your analysis. Use the graphic organizer below to map out your ideas.

**Compose** a well-crafted essay in which you formally compare and contrast the arguments. Remember, your essay must have a thesis (what is it that you’re “proving” about the two arguments you’re comparing and analyzing?), must provide a comparative close reading of both arguments using specific textual evidence, and must draw on your understandings of rhetorical analysis and argument. (This can be a lot of fun to write. Make it interesting!)

| Rhetorical Elements Unique to “Anti-Hero” | Points Where the Arguments OVERLAP | Rhetorical Elements Unique to the Song of Your Choice |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
|                                           |                                    |                                                       |

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### Synthesizing Taylor Swift's Anti-Hero

In many ways, Taylor Swift's song "Anti-Hero" might be considered an argument about **insecurity**. This, of course, is not an uncommon theme in popular culture and society at large. So here's what you're going to do next:

**First**, identify another song of your choice that is thematically similar (related to **insecurity**). It's important that the song you choose offers a rich and comparable argument to Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero." Examples include:

- "Unpretty" by TLC
- "Don't Let Me Get Me" by Pink
- "Stressed Out" by Twenty One Pilots
- "Victoria's Secret" by Jax

**Then**, closely read and analyze your selected text before **synthesizing** with Taylor Swift's argument. Your synthesis should focus on combining **IDEAS** across both texts. For example, consider what one speaker might say to another. (How might Jax agree with, disagree with, or qualify the ideas and claims that Swift makes in her argument?) This kind of analytical paper is different from a comparative rhetorical analysis in that it isn't asking you to compare devices – rather, it's asking you to put the speaks "into conversation" with one another.

Be thorough and thoughtful in your synthesis and connective analysis. Use the graphic organizer below to develop your ideas.

**Compose** a well-crafted essay in which you connect and synthesize the arguments. (What argument can YOU make, using these two texts as the driving forces behind your claims?) Remember, your essay must have a thesis (the original idea you're "proving" using the intersection of both arguments you've synthesized), and must support that thesis through the use of textual evidence across the readings in every body paragraph. (Be insightful! Take interpretive risks as you develop unique connections across the texts! Make it interesting!)

| Insights Unique to "Anti-Hero" | NEW Insights Where the Arguments<br><u>Make More Sense of Each Other / Inform Each Other</u> | Insights Unique to the Song of Your Choice |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
|                                |                                                                                              |                                            |

| Textual Evidence from "Anti-Hero" | Textual Evidence from the Song of Your Choice | Bring These Ideas Together in a Single Sentence,<br>e.g., "Swift argues __, which X would criticize for ___..." |
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|                                   |                                               |                                                                                                                 |

Essay Length: \_\_\_\_\_

Essay Due: \_\_\_\_\_