Assignment #4: Rhetorical Song Analysis

A rhetorical analysis aims to understand how a particular act of writing or speaking influences a particular audience at a particular time. The purpose, audience, genre, context, and inferred meaning of a text all come together to create its rhetorical situation. This also includes how the text is presented: the form, font, type of media used, who has access to it, how it’s marketed, how many copies were sold, etc.

Often, presenting a text in two different ways can have a drastic impact on its meaning and impact. We see this often in music. Songs—like essays, images, advertisements, etc.—can be persuasive arguments. The message we perceive is created not only by the lyrics, but the rhetorical situation: genre, artist, audience, cultural context, instruments, mood, pace, video, packaging, voice of the singer, etc.

For this assignment, I want you to choose a song and rhetorically analyze two different versions. You may use one of my suggestions, or find one of your own. There are a number of free web sites that allow you legally listen to songs without downloading, as well as YouTube.

Suggestions:
- “Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This) by Eurythmics and Marilyn Manson
- “I Will Survive” by Gloria Gaynor and Cake
- “Gin and Juice” by Snoop Doggy Dogg and The Gourds

Your analysis should be a 2 page essay (about 650 words) in which you analyze the song’s argument and how it changes (if at all) from version to version. You consider some or all of the following:

- What’s happening in each song? What are some of the themes? Is there a plot? Does the song tell a story or convey a narrative? What is it?
- How does the presentation of each song differ? Who is singing? What does their voice sound like? What instruments are being used? What tone or mood do these things create? Are there technological aspects in the song? What are they? What effects do they have?
- Does the writer’s purpose change from song to song?
- Does the cultural context change?
- Does the genre and intended audience change?
- Do these changes affect the meaning or connotation of the text?
- Do particular words take on a different meaning to you?
- Does the song’s overall meaning/message, change from version to version? How and why?

Do not simply list out the answers to these questions! Assimilate them into a cogent piece of writing. An introduction and conclusion are not required, but you should have a clearly stated thesis and main points. Make sure you tackle only one issue per paragraph and attempt to make logical transitions between them. Your essay should be typed and include your name, date, and the word count in the upper left hand corner.