ENGL 436 paper #1

2-3 pages (double-spaced, 1" margins, normal font/size), due on **Friday, 6.1.12**

(NOTE: This means you should go on to the third page, even if only by a word.)

This first essay is designed to get you back to the basics of close reading and specific textual analysis before we dive into more complicated and multilayered arguments later on. A two-page paper doesn't afford you much time or space for throat-clearing, so I'd like you to get to the analysis as quickly as possible, i.e. *immediately*. You shouldn't feel the need to ease your way into the paper with grandiose and generalizing claims about Literature™ or the history of worldness through the ages—just get to the substance as quickly as possible. I want to see what you can do at the level of the text, and I want to get you primed to build your later analyses on strong close reading skills. It may be useful to think of this first assignment as less of a paper *per se* and more of an exercise, designed to produce the kind of analysis that will later lead you to something that looks more like a paper.

Because close readings depend upon the actual language and formal properties used in a work, your essays will have to **include at least one quotation** from your chosen text, the particulars of which will you spend time analyzing with an eye toward word choice, sentence or shot structure, aesthetics, rhythm, figurative language or visual reference, and so on. Our conversation on the first day about the versions of worldness embedded in "A Whole New World" and "Part of Your World" is a good example of what such an analysis might look like (starting with the particular—the lyrical content of the song, its arrangement within the song structure, the specific visual details accompanying it—and moving into the general—theories of worldness), and of how it might enable you to think through larger questions raised by the text. The analysis of the end scene of the *Girls* episode, posted on the course website, is another useful example, as is our conversation about the prologue/overture to *Melancholia*. Obviously if you're writing about one of our TV/film texts, citing particulars is somewhat more complicated in practice, but even if you're not quoting dialogue, you should of course be making reference to the composition and editing of particular sequences and shots. Citations should follow **MLA format**.

At the most basic level, I'd like you to key in on ***one moment*** in one of the texts we've read/watched thus far—a moment that seems rich, fruitful, enigmatic, internally contradictory, or otherwise interesting and ripe for analytical unpacking. Use this moment to think through some question posed implicitly or explicitly by the text (is a world something that needs to be held up or held together? what makes a world "new"? what is the nature of our connection to people on the other side of the world? what's the difference between a world and a universe?). You don't need to solve the problems of life, the universe, and everything in two pages, but your analysis should exhibit some awareness of why and how it might matter. This is what I affectionately refer to as the **"so what?"** question: what does your exercise of English Major® brand reading skills on a particular text *produce*? How could it be made to matter to someone who doesn't do what we do? If everything you say is true, then what? You don't need to offer explicit answers to these questions or even necessarily a conclusion that points toward "larger implications," but you should at least keep the "so what?" question in the back of your mind. In other words: if, upon reading your paper, I asked you "so what?," you should have a convincing answer in mind.

Your essay should be written for **an audience that is not part of our class** (i.e. that has not been privy to our discussions and has not necessarily read/watched all our texts or read our syllabus) but that has some familiarity with the work you're discussing. As a result, keep summary to a minimum: keep your reader clued in, but don't assume he/she needs a great deal of context. This also means you shouldn't refer to "the conversation we had in class about [x]," though you're of course welcome to build on thoughts discussed in or generated by the class.

I'd also like your paper to have a **title.** This title should not be "Paper #1" or "Close Reading of *Lonelygirl15*"; it should in some way encapsulate or set up the question you see your paper addressing or the task you see it accomplishing. A title is a hugely significant and forceful part of your argument; don't waste the opportunity.

As always, ***please let me know if you have questions.***

Some Ruminations on Close Reading

Close reading denotes an approach to analysis that pays attention to how a text is constructed. Rather than summarizing the plot or discussing characters, close reading focuses on the language and formal qualities used to generate and shape plot, characters, setting, and so on.

* * * * *

Components of a literary work that close reading will often explore include the following:

-What characterizes the relationship of the narrator to his/her subject matter? To his/her audience? Through which characters, if any, is the narration focalized, and how consistently?

-What is the pace of the narration? How does the text transition? What tendencies does a narrator exhibit in terms of word choice, tone, and focus?

-How are incidents narrated? How are they framed? What makes some seem weightier than others?

-What details seem central to the workings of the text? What details seem extraneous? Why do the latter appear in the text at all?

* * * * *

If you're analyzing a visual text, obviously there are different formal considerations to think about: staging/mise-en-scene, shot composition, editing, visual pacing, the presence or absence of extradiegetic sound (sound that doesn't come from within the film's fictional world), the use of certain shot/scene durations or camera angles, and so on.