**SOCIAL MEDIA ASSIGNMENT: The Concept of Persona in New Media**

**THE BACKGROUND**

The concept of "persona" is essential in analyzing traditional literary texts. Our sense of the voice presented by the text--which we inevitably associate with the artist who created the text--is one of the key elements we have to understand a work, and we rely on our sense of that voice more than we often realize.

In the subset of new media called "social media," that sense of persona is extremely strong. We read people's blogs, status updates, and tweets to gain a sense of the person behind them--even when it's a person we know well--and the early research on social media, such as that carried out by the Pew Trust--suggests that as early as in our teens, we start to create multiple online personae or identities, embellish and manipulate them, edit them or screen them to withhold or mask information--in other words, rhetorically adjust our **own** personae in the same ways that many of our favorite authors manipulate literary identities.

This assignment will ask you to focus on the construction of one specific persona--your own--in social media.

**WHAT TO DO**

1. Choose a prolific user of social media (web, blogging, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) 🡪 YOU!
2. Study your social media output over the course of a sustained period of at least two weeks. (The lovely thing about the Web is that you can go back easily through online archives.) Examine the way(s) in which YOU create, project, and modify YOUR online persona. Document instances where you see particularly interesting things going on. If you are on several platforms (for instance Facebook and YouTube and Twitter), you may pick up valuable insights from comparing and contrasting the persona presented in each setting.
3. Conduct some research on social media and persona that deepens your analysis. Since you are analyzing yourself, you can look at the published research on age group, gender, educational status, etc., of social media users, and see how you fit into the trends.
4. Complete an analysis, with a thesis, about the significant elements of persona that YOU present in YOUR social media identities.
5. The focus in the end should be on YOUR persona and how it may change in social media. This is an experimental assignment and I'm not at all sure how it will turn out; that's part of the interest I have in it!