CL R1A.2 / Translating Women
S20 / Gittleman, Ward-Vetrano
Dante section adapted from Lensing-Sharp

Close Reading:
What is Content? What is Form?

Over the past few classes, we've talked about close reading as:
- reading closely
  - what emerges when you do this?
- a process of engaging with a text that can include:
  - annotating / marking up the text
  - strategies from the Heuristics Toolkit
    (e.g. paraphrasing, notice and focus, looking for patterns)
- focusing your attention on individual words, phrases, and details in order to delve deeper into analyzing and writing about a text

Today, we'll add to this working understanding by thinking of **close reading as paying attention to *both* content and form**. To start, let's brainstorm here:

Content	Form
➢ the *what*	➢ the *how*

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Let's take a look at some concrete examples to get a better sense of what **form** is. Let's start with the opening of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (Pt. 1 Inferno – Canto I – (1–3)):

> "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
> mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
> che la diritta via era smarrita"

Caroline Bergvall's "Via: 48 Dante Variations" collects 48(!) different translations of these lines. Below, you'll find some of them. What similarities and differences do you notice?

	Translations	*What formal details are similar or different? What kinds of impressions do these details give you? How do they change your understanding of what's going on in the text?*
1	"In the midtime of life I found myself Within a dusky wood; my way was lost." (Shaw, 1914)	
2	"Midway along the highroad of our days, I found myself within a shadowy wood, Where the straight path was lost in tangled ways." (Wheeler, 1911)	

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3	"On traveling one half of our life's way, I found myself in darkened forests when I lost the straight and narrow path to stray." (Arndt, 1994)	
4	"In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself In a dark forest The straightforward way Misplaced." (Schwerner, 2000)	
5	"Half over the wayfaring of our life, Since missed the right way, through a night-dark wood Struggling, I found myself." (Musgrave, 1893)	

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6	"Midway this way of life we're bound upon, I woke to find myself in a dark wood, Where the right road was wholly lost and gone" (Sayers, 1949)	
7	"Half way along the road we have to go, I found myself obscured in a great forest, Bewildered, and I knew I had lost the way." (Sisson, 1980)	
8	"Halfway on our life's journey, in a wood, From the right path I found myself astray." (Heaney, 1993)	

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9	"In the mid-journey of our mortal life, I wandered far into a dark some wood, Where the true road no longer might be seen." (Chaplin, 1913)	
10	"Midway in our life's journey I went astray from the straight road & woke to find myself alone in a dark wood" (Ciardi, 1996)	

A few more guidelines:

- As you deepen your reading of form, focus on the **effects** it has on the reader, not on intention. In other words, for our class, it doesn't matter what Dante wanted to convey when he was writing the text, or what each translator was really thinking. What matters is how the details you analyze contribute to your own observations, interpretations, and claims about the text.
- This means that there are always multiple valid interpretations of the same text, and even of the same quote! Your interpretation might be different from ours, or from your peers', or you might even incorporate **multiple possibilities** into your own analysis. This often leads to a richer piece of writing.
- For these reasons, it's important to always include concrete **evidence** and specific details (in other words, by directly quoting the text) when you discuss and write about your interpretations.