

## DANTE FOR BEGINNERS

Three-fifths or seven-eighths of the way  
Through the path of my life, I forget the exact fraction,  
I discovered I'd lost the true way and that  
Was when I saw these three animals - one was  
A leopard (stands for pride), the second one  
Was a she-wolf (stands for avarice), I think the third  
Was a jack-rabbit (stands for dopiness?) or maybe  
It was a turtle (stands for smugness?) or was it  
A chipmunk (stands for friskiness?) Anyway, I saw  
These three things. Skipping right along, this  
Tall dark stranger came up to me and he said  
"Hi there, my name is Virgil and I'm going to go  
To hell with you" and I said oh yeah and he said  
Oh yeah, and before I knew it we were in Canto Five  
Of the INFERNO where I saw Paolo and Francesca  
Who were being carried along on this terrific wind,  
And Paolo got off and he came over to me and he said  
"So we're getting laid a lot, so what's it to you,  
Are you one of these sick creeps who gets off on  
Other people's sex lives? And he punched me in the nose.  
(I already had a black eye and three bumps on the top  
Of my head where three popes and a poet had bopped me  
For sticking them down in hell). Skipping right  
Along, when I got to PURGATORY there was Aristotle,  
The Master of Those Who Know, and I asked him  
Why was he down there and he pulled a long face and he said,  
"I was born in the wrong time and the wrong place"  
And I said that sounded awfully unfair and he said  
"O I don't know, it's like being born in Hoboken,  
You sort of know you're never going to go anywhere."  
Skipping right along, a few cantos later Virgil tapped me  
On the shoulder and he told me he didn't feel like going  
Any further and he went poof, and just then Beatrice  
Appeared from out of nowhere and she said she'd take me  
The rest of the way. I said all this climbing up and down  
Another's stairs and eating another's bread has kept  
Me lean and has usurped on earth my place, my place, my place,  
And she said that was interesting and why didn't I write it down.  
Skipping right along, in PARADISE I saw Jesus and God the Father  
And they were saying to each other "I think you're terrific" and  
"No no, you're the one that's really terrific" and "Do you really  
Think so well that's just terrific." So I turned to Beatrice  
And I told her I thought she was really terrific and she said  
Don't go getting fresh on me buddy or I'll call a cop. Skipping  
Right along, when I got to the top of all those circles I noticed  
I cast no shadow and I had these triple rhymes all the way down  
My right side, and when I looked up overhead I saw the sun  
That moves the stars and all those other things, or was it  
The stars that move the sun and everything else, I don't  
Remember but anyway it was something like that.

