Annotations

* “it” (l. 109) – The refers to Dante’s cord, with which he wanted earlier to capture the leopard with. Geryon reminds of leopard, particularly with his spotted coat.
* “knotted and coiled” (l. 111) – This reminds of a snake, particularly with the following alliteration with “s” that follows when Dante speaks to himself. The snake fits Geryon too – a symbol of fraud, and also one with a serpent’s body.
* “right” (l. 112) – One of two occasions in which Dante and Virgil move to the right instead of the left, as happens throughout the rest of the Inferno. This marks the backwards and sideways nature of fraud, and a similar explication is given in the notes for this choice to turn right. Furthermore, in Homer omens of eagles / birds on the right are a good sign, while such omens on the left are bad (ex: Hektor ignores an eagle on the left when the Trojans push to the Achaean ships). The left omens are consistent with the significance of Dante’s movement left, and this episode may be just
* “much care men ought to exercise with those … out outer act” (l. 118-120) – This is significant on a couple of levels.
  + First, this portrayal of Virgil is pretty topical, considering that he is calling upon the beast of fraud to do a favor for him. Those who can see into other’s thoughts are not at risk of fraud; should everyone have this power, Geryon would be powerless.
  + Second, this seems almost as a warning against those who would commit fraud: exercise care against those who can tell if you’re lying / committing fraud, which probably includes God as a slight reference here as well.
* “your” (l. 122) – This could be a slight forerunner to the direct address made a few lines down. Does this “your” also address the reader?
* “Faced with that truth … blameless” (l. 124-126) – If Dante really emphasized the *Inferno* as a literal experience, isn’t this fraud? This is probably why he does this circular swearing on the *Comedy* as a testament of the *Comedy*’s truth. This also partially motivates the direct reference to the reader as well, to try and dissipate some of the doubt that comes in.
* “swimming”, “waves,” etc. (l. 131-136) – Here, Dante invokes imagery of water / sea while literally being in Hell. It’s a departure from the loud and very red / black types of agony that we see pictured before this.
  + Maybe this depicts the idea that fraud is deceitful and runs counter to appearances? It offers a facade of salvation (water) but is really a bad thing!
  + Also, it gives a picture of Geryon rising from the depths, which has the effect of foreshadowing the inevitable descent back down into the depths. What goes up, must come down.
* “Anchor snagged” (l. 134) – Usage of these words conjure up an image of drowning, despair, and sinking.
* “Behold the beast … fills all the world!” (l. 1-3) – This is a passage spoken by Virgil.
  + Fittingly, the style is reminiscent of Homer and Virgil’s epic poems, with a bunch of really dramatic epithets littered throughout
  + The entire passage is periphrasis, never mentioning Geryon by name. This, coupled with phrases such as “fills all the world” gives a massive foreboding scale to Geryon, who is the manifestation of sin.
* “landed with his head and torso” (l. 8) – The more human parts are showing here, hiding the monster tail below that waits to sting and poison those taken in by fraud.
* “face he wore was that of a just man” (l. 10) – This presents a human face to fraud, hiding the monster body underneath. It underscores the human nature of fraud, and that Hell is a punishment for humans.
  + Geryon was originally three-headed or three-bodied.
* “just man … serpent … paws” (l. 10-13) Those three bodies in Greek mythology are here transformed into three separate beasts, starting with man, then serpent / reptile, and finally a lion / leopard.
* “serpent” (l. 12) – Continuation of earlier, where imagery of a snake was invoked.
* “two paws, with hair up to the armpits” (l. 13) – This seems to remind the reader of the lion that Dante came across the in the dark wood at the opening of the poem.
* “twining knots and circlets” (l. 15) – This is similar to above, reminding readers of the leopard from the dark wood. Mandelbaum’s notes have that the leopard is a representation of lust rather than fraud.
* “Turks and Tartars”, “guzzling Germans” (l. 16, 21) – Dante brings in foreign cultures in the description of a monster. This isn’t particularly insulting either, but is reflective of the idea that these foreign people were exotic and strange, tying that mystique into the dramatic description of a monster from Hell.
* “Arachne” (l.18) – Arachne was known in Greek mythology to be a talented weaver that was turned into a spider after a competition with Athena.
  + What is the role of Greek lore in the *Inferno*, given that they should be pagan tales?
    - Seem to really be justified as incomplete manifestations of the Christian faith, where being seen as ends in and of themselves is sinful, but not so as part of Christian framework (as Dante does himself by inserting such figures into his Christian Hell)
  + Some figures are heavily altered, like Geryon, whereas some are not and are only mentioned in passing such as Arachne.
* “shore, with part of them on land and part in water” (l. 19-20) – More imagery of water as started on the last page, and now is even more ominous; if Geryon is the boat, then the boat won’t be sailing on the sea, but rather sinking into it.
* “beaver” (l. 22) – According to Mandelbaum’s notes, beavers attract fish by luring them with an oil-like substance, just as fraudsters lure in and betray their victims.
* “envenomed fork, which has a tip just like a scorpion’s” (l. 26-27) – The end of Geryon’s description, which moved from top to bottom, and from most human to most beastly, descending down the monsters body as Dante descends into Hell.

Reflection

The annotations reveal exactly how much work was put into the creation of the *Inferno* from both Mandelbaum and Dante himself. A common theme between the annotations is that devices like imagery and symbols always recur, appearing a few lines or even cantos down the line. For example, Geryon’s leopard-like pelt, referential to the opening in a dark wood, or the continual mentions of snake-like imagery are both examples of how the *Inferno* is an incredibly complex and multidimensional work. There’s so much to unpack – multiple threads, callbacks to earlier in the *Inferno* and other works, etc – that the annotations leave multiple questions to be answered. For instance, the opening to Canto XVII describes Geryon and mentions Arachne: why does Geryon get modified so much and Arachne doesn’t?

The main reason for Geryon’s metamorphosis from his three-bodied form in Greek myth (though this feature is partially conserved in the three beasts it is now composed of) seems to be to better serve as a representation of fraud. The human face on top of a monster which descends back down into a scorpion tail marks the necessarily human nature of fraud that masks the betrayal of the sin, and the descending depiction of Geryon from human, down to serpent, lion, and finally, scorpion from head to tail is part of a recurring motif of falling.

Beyond Geryon specifically, the process of doing annotations made more clear what role these mythological monsters play within the scope of Dante’s work. As a Christian, Dante’s repurposing of mythological creatures is on the surface heretical, but within the scope of the *Inferno* work as parts of a greater Christian whole; he doesn’t believe in Geryon or Arachne or Minos as meaningful constructs independently, but rather as parts of a Christian fusion of past and present ideas. While this can explain a possible reconciliation between traditional Christianity and the choices Dante takes with the narrative but doesn’t explain why Dante willingly introduces fantastic monsters pulled from myth in the first place, especially seeing as Dante knows that the account is made less credulous by such a construction. Taking liberties with religious doctrine for the sake of rhetorical force makes significantly less clear the role that Christianity plays in the play, almost making it take a backseat to the classical influences.

The annotations also shed some light on and complicate larger themes throughout the work. For instance, the idea of Geryon having a human face starkly reminds the reader that the sufferers in Hell are former humans themselves, and the inviolability of Virgil compared to Dante conveys the same message, insofar as Dante has not yet been relegated to Heaven nor Hell, but Virgil has. Sometimes, little details, such as turning right instead of left, run counter to the larger motif and point out where to pay attention, because that deviation can allow for the expansion of the original trend it bucks (in the example of right and left, the right turn calls attention to the previously taken left turns, as well as marking the special nature of fraud). The process of annotating makes clear the complexity and richness of the *Inferno* and makes a point of how much there is to gleam from any given passage of it.