Cataloging and Mapping Ovid's Myths

—Georgina Ramadanovic (Mentor: R. Scott Smith)

As the world moves forward with technology and we continue to prioritize fields of study and professions that are focused on innovation and profit, the humanities tend to get left behind. Classics in particular can seem daunting to young people because of the bulky readings and the need to learn complex ancient languages. In order to keep classics alive, it is necessary for us to also move forward and not let our field fall behind just for the preservation of tradition.

This past summer, I completed the Research Experience and Apprenticeship Program (REAP) through the Hamel Center for Undergraduate Research at UNH. This research project is part of an international effort to map and catalog ancient myth, headed by classics professors Scott Smith at the University of New Hampshire and Greta Hawes at Macquarie University in Australia. They created the database called MANTO (Mapping Ancient Narratives, Territories, Objects) and have been dedicated to entering data from ancient myths into the platform. The MANTO database is part of the movement to move the humanities forward and make increasingly frequent forays into the digital realm. There are not many comprehensive online resources for ancient history or myth, and the ones that do exist tend to be hard to navigate and outdated. Until recently, this information has been stored in physical books only, which are harder to access today than their online counterparts. My research contributes to this publicly available platform that anyone, regardless of their knowledge level, can access free of charge, working toward the larger goal of creating an interactive and geographical source for ancient myth that displays all the relationships between characters or the places associated with them, unlike a narrative encyclopedia.

From Myth to MANTO Data

Until now, none of the Roman author Ovid's work had been entered into the database and it consisted mostly of ancient Greek mythical data. My goal during the project was to gain an in-depth understanding of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, written in the first century CE, and to complete the data entry of its first five books into the MANTO database. This is important for the advancement of the MANTO project because the *Metamorphoses* is the largest and most

important collection of Roman myths. It is a narrative poem of fifteen books which chronicle the story of the world from its creation up to the post-Julius Caesar Rome in which Ovid was writing.

My research involved reading through the entire *Metamorphoses* in English and then converting the narrative for entry into the MANTO database. Information in the MANTO database is centered around agents and interactions. Every character, artifact, place, landmark, and collective is its own entity in the database. After creating the necessary entities, they can be linked in ties using predicates. An example of a data point from the first book of the *Metamorphoses* is: "**Jupiter** expels **Saturn** to **Tartarus**." In this phrase, Jupiter, Saturn, and Tartarus are entities. They are linked to each other with the predicate "expels" and the prepositional phrase "to Tartarus." It is very important to capture when two characters interact and to capture what agents do and, whenever possible, to specify the location in which the action occurs as well as any movement through space.

Once I had read all fifteen books of the *Metamorphoses* in English, I started going through the first five books line-by-line to mine them for data points. This entailed another very close reading of a faithful English translation as well as frequent reference to the corresponding lines in the original. Because I am proficient in Latin, I was able to cross-reference specific data with the original text for clarity to ensure that everything I entered was correct.

Extracting concrete data about interactions and spatial movement from a text written poetically is time-consuming and difficult. It took a lot of time to decide what exactly could be entered as a definite interaction because the text uses a lot of flowery language, anecdotes, comparisons, and metaphors which cannot be converted easily into data. Referencing the original Latin text came in handy because translators often take liberties for the sake of a well-flowing translation. As is typical of the epic tradition, Ovid and his translators tend not to call characters by name but instead opt to refer to their ancestors (usually their father or a well-known mythical relative). Reference to the original text allowed me to verify who is who, as did an accompanying commentary by William Anderson. I also opted to read excerpts of the Latin text to familiarize myself with Ovidian language and the flow of his stories. The *Metamorphoses* is some of the most influential poetry surviving classical Rome, so it was important to me to have a direct understanding of the text as it was originally written.

The main page on the public facing MANTO website (www.manto.unh.edu) shows the map (Fig. 1) of all the places entered in the database with dots indicating the characters and interactions that have happened at those places. When you zoom out on the map, you can see the more concentrated clusters of dots around Greece and modern-day Turkey where most of the actions in Greek myth take place. As more data is entered, the map continues to be populated with locations mentioned in myth.

Figure 1. The MANTO map, as seen on the website: www.manto.unh.edu

All the data points I entered over the summer will be available on the MANTO website and in this map as publicly accessible information. Many of the stories I worked on are completely new in the database, as I am one of the first people to be working with Roman myth on the MANTO team. As time goes on, what I have entered will be corroborated by the entry of more Roman texts, many of which will reinforce or add alternate versions to the stories I entered. It is truly rewarding to know that I have made a visible contribution to the digital humanities movement because I know how useful MANTO and other online resources are to students because I make use of them regularly for my own classes and interests.

I am continuing to work with Professor Smith on the MANTO project in the "Greek Myth Lab," a group of students who meet weekly to do data entry under his supervision. I will use this time to finish entering book five of the *Metamorphoses.* I feel fortunate to be at an institution where professors are spearheading the movement to expand digital humanities.

I would like to thank Professor Scott Smith, my mentor for this project, who has been helping me succeed in classics since I first came to UNH. I would also like to thank Professor Greta Hawes and her research team at Macquarie University for their help in checking my work and answering my questions. Thanks to Professor Sean Madigan for recommending me to the REAP program and to the Hamel Center for Undergraduate Research for giving me the opportunity to complete this project. Special thanks to Mr. Dana Hamel and the Donald J. Wilcox Endowed Fellowship Fund for providing financial support for my research.

Author and Mentor Bios

Portsmouth, New Hampshire native **Georgina Ramadanovic** will graduate from the University of New Hampshire in spring 2026 with a bachelor of arts degree in classical languages and literatures, with a concentration in linguistics, and Italian studies. She is in the University Honors Program and serves as treasurer of Eta Sigma Phi, the national classics honors society. After working with Dr. Scott Smith throughout her first year, Georgina applied to the Research Experience and Apprenticeship Program (REAP) to continue this research through the summer. Conducting a close reading of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* to add to the MANTO database was both a challenging and rewarding experience for Georgina. The bulk of the work was done independently and remotely, but she felt motivated by making this information publicly available for other students to use. Georgina feels her project is relatively unique among undergraduate research projects, many of which tend to be science focused. Publishing in *Inquiry* allows other students to see the type of research one can do as a humanities major.

R. Scott Smith is professor of classics and chair of the Department of Classics, Humanities, and Italian Studies at the University of New Hampshire, where he has taught since 2000. His major field of study is ancient myth and mythography, with special focus on the intersection of mythography, space, and geography. He is currently co-director of a digital database of Greek myth, MANTO, and produces the podcast *The Greek Myth Files.* In addition, he is interested in how mythography operates in scholia and commentaries and is undertaking a student-supported project to translate mythographical narratives in the Homeric scholia, Servius, and other scholiastic texts. Dr. Smith has supervised ten undergraduate students with research opportunities through the Hamel Center for Undergraduate Research. He is enthusiastic about the work of undergraduate students on the MANTO database, noting that adding Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to the database is a big accomplishment. Writing for *Inquiry*, Dr. Smith believes, is vitally important in helping scholars find ways to take their detailed and narrow work and translate it into forms accessible to the masses.