

Hans Wechtlin, “Pyramus and Thisbe,” ca. 1510, woodcut, Cleveland Museum of Art, 1950.396

Mastery Image

Thisbe discovers Pyramus beneath a fountain topped by a blindfolded Cupid. So blinded by love, Pyramus irrationally has taken his own life, because he had thought his lover Thisbe has been killed. Very much alive, she comes upon the grisly scene.

Ovid (*Met.* 4.55-166) sets the story in Babylon, and perhaps he borrowed the story from a source associated with Asia Minor, where a river is named Pyramus. The important matter with this story is that Ovid is the single ancient source conveying the story from antiquity to the Middle Ages and Renaissance and beyond, when it found popularity all across Europe. Shakespeare used the Pyramus & Thisbe story as a thematic underpinning for all of his play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595), and then foregrounded the source with especial clarity in that play's closing act, as the “Tale of Pyramus and Thisbe” is performed as a play with the play. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* still remains a critically important source for classical mythology into the Twenty-first Century.

See ML p. 655 for a recap of the story, or OGCMA p. 962 as well.

