

## The Turning Hinge: Cosmological Double Meanings in Ovid's Pyramus and Thisbe

That Ovid invokes cosmology in the *Metamorphoses* requires no stretch of the imagination. He begins the epic with a cosmogony, and cosmological themes appear throughout. One particular moment of cosmological import comes in Ovid's retelling of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. The two young lovers, having agreed upon their plan to meet under a mulberry tree beyond the city walls, wait as "the sun, seeming to go slowly, sinks into the water, and from the same waves the night comes out" (*et lux, tarde discedere visa, / praecipitatur aquis, et aquis nox exit ab isdem, Met. 4.91-92*). This passage marks not only the transition from day to night, but also gestures towards a larger cosmological rhythm—a turning of time and space that frames human action within the wider movements of the heavens.

This paper focuses on the subsequent lines as further evidence of Ovid's cosmological commitments. "Prudent Thisbe," the poet writes, "goes out through the darkness, with the hinge having been turned..." (*Callida per tenebras versato cardine Thisbe / egreditur, Met. 4.93-94*). While this phrase clearly refers, as Anderson notes (1997, p. 421), to the physical turning of her door's hinge—a common feature of elegiac poetry (Rosati 2024, p. 377)—I argue that *versato cardine* also evokes the cosmological *cardo mundi*, the earth's axis or "hinge of the world," a reference overlooked by modern commentators.

This dual resonance is not incidental. Ovid uses the construction elsewhere in explicitly cosmological contexts (e.g. *vertendi cardinis, F. 1.119*). This paper deploys close linguistic analysis, intertextual comparison with the *Fasti*, and a selective engagement with the technical vocabulary of the Roman land surveyors to show that Ovid borrows and reframes surveying concepts as poetic devices. It argues that Ovid's recurrent hinge imagery stages encounters

between private narratives and public cosmologies, transforming thresholds into metonyms for orientation, measurement, and temporal ordering. The argument widens the methodological aperture for reading Augustan poetry alongside technical treatises. By treating literary diction as a site where scientific and poetic epistemologies are put into conversation, we can expand on the literary frameworks presented by Pandey (2018) and the spatial ideas presented by Nicolet (1991) to unlock a deeper understanding of Ovid's interlocution with contemporary politics.

The paper concludes by proposing two broader implications. First, attention to axial and hinge imagery reveals new dimensions of temporality in the *Metamorphoses*, where human fates are choreographed to cyclical and rotational models of time. Second, Ovid's embedding of the surveyors' spatial reasoning revises our understanding of Augustan poetics: it is more dialogic with technical expertise than previously recognized. This reading invites comparative work across Latin genres to trace how technical vocabularies circulate between specialized practices and poetic imagination. The analysis attempts to reorient debates about the relationship between literature and material knowledge in the Roman world and to furnish fresh directions for future research on cosmology, surveying, and the poetics of orientation.

## Bibliography

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