

## Descendants with Daddy Issues: Fatherless Sons in the *Iliad*

Out of the various familial roles and interactions portrayed in Homer's *Iliad*, the relationship between father and son emerges as a source of identity for the heroes at the center of the poem. While these characters strive to distinguish themselves in the contests of war, they consistently reference their ancestors in order to establish their merit as *aristoi*. They are even seldom named without the addition of a patronym as a reference to their patrilineage. But, what happens to a hero's identity when his father is separated from him before he has fully established himself as a member of heroic society? S. Hübner's and D. Ratzen's *Growing up Fatherless in Antiquity* (2009) presents a broad picture of the political, cultural, and familial impacts of fatherlessness as they appear in antiquity from Homeric poetry to late Christianity. However, the portrayal of fatherless children and their struggles still remains widely unexplored in Classics. While many scholars, such as S. Mill, L. Pratt, and R. Finlay, have examined individual cases of sons and their difficulties, this study notes an overall theme of fatherlessness in the *Iliad*, which suggests that the epic revolves around the struggles of a few young heroes with absent fathers as they attempt to prove themselves as *aristoi*.

In particular, this study examines Achilles, Diomedes, and Astyanax all of whom emerge as young heroes who must cope with social and personal difficulties caused by the absence, separation, or death of a father. As one of the youngest Achaeans, Diomedes frequently attempts to prove his worth as a hero, yet the older Achaeans constantly single out his shortcomings by comparing him to his deceased father he never knew. For instance, both Agamemnon and Athena reproach Diomedes' hesitation in battle, saying his father was never a cowardly fighter (4.70-3, 5.809-13). Likewise, when the comparably young Achilles withdraws from the Achaean cause, other heroes, such as those in the embassy of book 9, urge him to resume his role as champion of

the Achaeans by referencing his father's sense of compassion for others (9.252-261). Although the infant Astyanax has not yet lost his father, both Hector and Andromache describe how he is expected to act as an adult: at times envisioning him living up to his father's reputation as a warrior (6.479-481), while at other times lamenting his fall from esteemed son to orphaned outcast (22.490-501). Despite each son's unique situation, other characters imply that their struggles all stem from the absence of their fathers.

By comparing these three sons and their treatment as fatherless sons, the absence of their fathers appears to create three distinct difficulties for *all of them*. First, without the father as an instructor, the son struggles to function under the standards and structures of society. Second, because the father offers an *exemplum* for the son to follow, it is difficult for the fatherless son to prove his pedigree to others by emulating his father's defining characteristics. Finally, because their relationship is based off the idea of reciprocity, the son is held to the expectation that he will either protect his father despite their separation or exact revenge on his behalf. Furthermore, the prevalence of this theme of fatherlessness suggests that the struggles of these fatherless sons to emerge as full members of the *aristoi* are integral to plot of the *Iliad*.

#### Works Cited

Avery, Harry C. 1998. "Achilles' Third Father." *Hermes* 126.4: 389-97.

Felson, Nancy. 2002. "Threpta and Invincible Hands: The Father-Son Relationship in *Iliad* 24."

*Arethusa* 35.1: 35-50.

Finlay, Robert. 1980. "Patroklos, Achilleus, and Peleus: Fathers and Sons in the *Iliad*." *CW* 73.5: 267-73.

- Graziosi, Barbara, and Johannes Haubold. 2003. "Homeric Masculinity: HNOREH and AGHNORIH." *JHS* 123: 60-76.
- Held, George F. 1987. "Phoenix, Agamemnon, and Achilles: Parables and Paradeigmata." *CQ* 37.2: 245-61.
- Holway, Richard. 2012. *Becoming Achilles: Child-sacrifice, War, and Misrule in the Iliad and beyond*. Lanham, MD: Lexington.
- Ingalls, Wayne B. 1998. "Attitudes towards Children in the *Iliad*." *EMC* 17.1: 13-34 .
- Mills, Sophie. 2000. "Achilles, Patroclus and Parental Care in Some Homeric Similes." *G&R* 47.1: 3-18.
- Pratt, Louise. 2007. "The Parental Ethos of the *Iliad*." *Hesperia Supplements* 41: 25-40.
- Pratt, Louise. 2009. "Diomedes, the Fatherless Hero of the *Iliad*." In *Growing up Fatherless in Antiquity*, 141-61. Sabine R. Hübner and David M. Ratzan, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Querbach, Carolyn A. 1976. "Conflicts between Young and Old in Homer's *Iliad*." In *The Conflict of Generations in Ancient Greece and Rome*. 55-64. Stephan Bertman, ed. Amsterdam, B. R. Grüner.
- Rosner, Judith A. 1976. "The Speech of Phoenix: *Iliad* 9.434-605." *Phoenix* 30.4: 314-27.
- Wöhrle, Georg. 2009. "Sons (and Daughters) without Fathers: Fatherlessness in the Homeric Epics." In *Growing up Fatherless in Antiquity*, 162-74. Sabine Hübner and David M. Ratzan, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.