

A Girl and Her Bow: Conflicting Images of Artemis in the *Iliad*

There exists much scholarship on the actions and interactions of the immortal deities in Homer's *Iliad*, both atop Olympus and directly on the battlefield amongst the mortals. Very little work, however, has been done on the depiction of Artemis, who remains a minor character despite her close relationship with Apollo. Though Budin and Petrovic both reference descriptions of Artemis from the *Iliad* in their comprehensive overviews of the goddess, neither expand much on Artemis as a character specifically within the context of the epic (Budin, 2016; Petrovic, 2010). This omission from scholarship not only excludes the analysis of a major mythological figure, but also overlooks insights on the broader question of the positionality of young females within Homer's epic.

This paper aims to characterize Artemis within the *Iliad* to make sense of the two distinct images presented by her few appearances in the epic. In certain passages, she appears as a deadly and ruthless archer alongside her brother, both as they battle for the Trojans at their father, Zeus', command (Hom. *Id.* 20.34), as well as in their retribution against Niobe's children in defense of their mother's honor (24.605-9). In others, however, she appears as a foolish and reckless child. Most notably in Book 21, in response to Artemis' scathing rebuke of Apollo, Hera handily puts Artemis in her place by not only mocking the Huntress' power over women and nature, but also scattering her arrows as if they were nothing but toys (21.479-96). Hera's choice of the vocative *κύων* brands Artemis a "dog" (21.481) and evokes imagery of a self-aggrandizing coward (Graver, 1995). When taken in the context of the "comic theomachy" occurring atop Olympus in Book 21, such invective against Artemis portrays the goddess as a laughable child punished by her stepmother for misbehaving (Louden, 2006).

To reconcile these conflicting images of Artemis, I focus on two key elements of Artemis' mythological identity: her eternally youthful status and her femininity. Specifically, I explore the ways in which the intersection of these two factors – the combined identity of Artemis as both young and female – accounts for these dichotomous portrayals. It is difficult to argue that the dismissive portrayals of Artemis are due solely to her femininity, given the numerous examples of powerful women in the *Iliad*. Indeed, Artemis' defeat and humiliation in Book 21 comes at the hands of Hera, a woman who holds considerable sway over both gods and goddesses on Olympus. Likewise, these portrayals cannot be attributed entirely to Artemis' youthful status, as Apollo, being of the same age, enjoys a fair share of autonomy and respect from gods and mortals alike for his involvement in the Trojan War. By contextualizing these descriptions of Artemis within the depictions of children in the *Iliad* and exploring the limits imposed on her domain as a Huntress of the wild involving herself in the affairs of war and men, I argue that Artemis, as a young female, appears capable and fearsome under the direction of an adult, such as Zeus, or in the presence of a figure more versed in the wars of men, such as Apollo. On her own, however, she is out of her element, and her limited domain over women and the natural world renders her talents useless and her character little more than a girl with a bow.

Despite Artemis' limited role in the events of the *Iliad*, a close analysis of her descriptions and the contexts in which they arise highlights an important occasion of intersectionality in which we must consider multiple aspects of identity to understand the layered nuances of character dynamics. The ways in which humans (and by extension, gods and goddesses) not only identify themselves but also understand and relate to one another cannot be reduced to a single dimension such as gender, age, or occupation. It is thus essential that we analyze character interactions as the result of these three-dimensional identities rather than solely

based on a single factor taken independently from the rest. I argue that such a method of analysis not only proves useful in deciphering Artemis' conflicting images within Homer's epic, but also will reveal additional insights regarding the interconnected facets in the identities, motivations, and actions of more central characters.

Bibliography

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