

Fathers and Sons in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Topic Code: LP)

The position of the father within the family, *paterfamilias*, was accorded great importance in Roman society: a father could expose a newborn child, he could punish and even kill his children-in-power, he owned any of their property, and he needed to give his consent for a child's marriage. It is not surprising, then, that the father-child relationship receives significant attention within Ovid's retelling of primarily Greek or Near-eastern stories in the *Metamorphoses*. Although the father-son relationship often does not play as crucial a role as other family relations do, several father-son pairs are prominent in the *Metamorphoses* and others further reveal expectations, ideals, or anxieties or show a softer, more affectionate, yet tragic side to this relationship.

The Sun and Phaethon and Daedalus and Icarus are key examples of this relationship. Both stories illustrate paternal concern and anxiety for a son, profound grief over a son's death, and the father's failure, despite his love and worrying, to protect or save his son. The sons aim to imitate their fathers yet fail not only to listen to their fathers' warnings but also to live up to their fathers' expectations, proving themselves inferior. Several of these themes reappear throughout the poem. Other fathers mourn a son's death (Priam/Aesacus, Lucifer/Ceyx), even to the extent of suicide (Oeneus/Meleager). Deucalion admits his inferiority to his father Prometheus when he wishes he had his skill to repopulate the earth. Sons boast of their lineage/father (Perseus, Hercules) or display *pietas* (Jason ironically asks Medea, who is moved by his *pietas*, to add some of his years to his elderly father). Although the most famous father/son is almost glossed over, Ovid briefly mentions that Aeneas left Troy with his father and chose of all the great wealth of Troy to take his son with him.

Although grief predominates and sons die tragically, nobody explicitly violates the relationship; no murder, no agonizing over choosing sides as with other relations in the poem. Yet a sense of failure lingers. Ovid appears to contradict this as he closes the epic with several mythological sons surpassing their fathers as precedents for the greatness of the son of a contemporary pair, Julius Caesar and his adopted son Augustus. Yet within this same context, Ovid seemingly undercuts this pivotal relationship.