

Fathers' Day: The Dotty Dads of Storyland

Robert Bly once noticed a phenomenon others will recognize. Whenever he called his parents' home and his father answered the phone, after their hello's, the next thing his father would say is: "I'll get your mother." An important moment for Bly was the day when he said, "Wait a minute. I want to talk to you."

Despite the fact that some religions speak of God the Father and ours is often described as a "patriarchal culture," fathers really get little respect in our society. Reflecting this fact are the dads who appear in Storyland. From Ozzie Nelson to Homer Simpson, television presents doofus dads who are kindly indulged by the rest of the family. They pay lip service to the notion that "Father Knows Best" but generally wink at each other about the loveable old fool who pretends to be head of the household.



Homer Simpson from "The Simpsons" series created by Matt Groening

Disney's children's films are full of Dotty Dads. Think of Belle's dizzy inventor father in "Beauty and the Beast"; it is the daughter who must take care of him, rather than the other way around. And Geppetto in "Pinocchio" is an equally loony

and pitiable figure, not some honored patriarch.



Maurice from Disney's "Beauty and the Beast"

The same is true in children's stories. Near the end of "Peter Pan," Mr. Darling worries his children may think him insignificant, and he has every reason to worry about their low opinion since he is painted as a buffoon who engages in silly and unbecoming behavior. And fathers fare little better in fairy tales where they are weak people easily bossed around by their new wives. How else can we explain why they don't jump to the defense of their beleaguered offspring: Cinderella, Snow White, and Hansel and Gretel?



Mr. Darling in Disney's "Peter Pan"

When we consider how fathers are presented in our culture, what is apropos is comedian Rodney Dangerfield's signature complaint: "I don't get no respect." But beneath is also a cry for consideration, not limited to just Father's Day. Instead of cuff links or tools or a watch, there's something else they really want.

"Attention must be paid."

If your father is no longer among the living, take time to contemplate the famous line about Willy Loman after the funeral in "Death of a Salesman" and directed to his children: "Attention must be paid." If your father is still alive, call him – but before he passes the phone, quickly insert the words: "Wait a minute. I want to talk to you."

For other pictures of papas in our culture, consider [Hollywood's paradigm of the negligent and careerist daddy, grandfathers in Disney's movie "Up," the absent father in "The Flint Heart," the absent father in "Hook," Barack Obama's fatherly advice, George Washington's Pa, and, of course, Moms in children's stories.](#)