

Extract, regarding 'The Judgement of Paris', from Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Volume Two*.

h. Paris's noble birth was soon disclosed by his outstanding beauty, intelligence, and strength: when little more than a child, he routed a band of cattle-thieves and recovered the cows they had stolen, thus winning the surname Alexander.¹ Though ranking no higher than a slave at this time, Paris became the chosen lover of Genone, daughter of the river Oeneus, a fountain-nymph. She had been taught the art of prophecy by Rhea, and that of medicine by Apollo while he was acting as Laomedon's herdsman. Paris and Oenone used to herd their flocks and hunt together; he carved her name in the bark of beech-trees and poplars.² His chief amusement was setting Agelaus's bulls to fight one another; he would crown the victor with flowers, and the loser with straw. When one bull began to win consistently, Paris pitted it against the champions of his neighbours' herds, all of which were defeated. At last he offered to set a golden crown upon the horns of any bull that could overcome his own; so, for a jest, Ares turned himself into a bull, and won the prize. Paris's unhesitating award of this crown to Ares surprised and pleased the gods as they watched from Olympus; which is why Zeus chose him to arbitrate between the three goddesses.³

i. He was herding his cattle on Mount Gargarus, the highest peak of Ida, when Hermes, accompanied by Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite, delivered the golden apple and Zeus's message: 'Paris, since you are as handsome as you are wise in affairs of the heart, Zeus commands you to judge which of these goddesses is the fairest.'

Paris accepted the apple doubtfully. 'How can a simple cattle-man like myself become an arbiter of divine beauty?' he cried. 'I shall divide this apple between all three.'

'No, no, you cannot disobey Almighty Zeus!' Hermes replied hurriedly. 'Nor am I authorized to give you advice. Use your native intelligence!'

'So be it,' sighed Paris. 'But first I beg the losers not to be vexed with me. I am only a human being, liable to make the stupidest mistakes.'

The goddesses all agreed to abide by his decision.

'Will it be enough to judge them as they are?' Paris asked Hermes, 'or should they be naked?'

'The rules of the contest are for you to decide,' Hermes answered with a discreet smile.

'In that case, will they kindly disrobe?'

Hermes told the goddesses to do so, and politely turned his back.

j. Aphrodite was soon ready, but Athene insisted that she should remove the famous magic girdle, -which gave her an unfair advantage by making everyone fall in love with the wearer. 'Very well,' said Aphrodite spitefully. 'I will, on condition that you remove your helmet - you look hideous without it.'

'Now, if you please, I must judge you one at a time,' announced Paris, 'to avoid distractive arguments. Come here, Divine Hera! Will you other two goddesses be good enough to leave us for a while?'

'Examine me conscientiously,' said Hera, turning slowly around, and displaying her magnificent figure,' and remember that if you judge me the fairest, I will make you lord of all Asia, and the richest man alive.'⁴

'I am not to be bribed, my Lady. ... Very well, thank you. Now I have seen all that I need to see. Come, Divine Athene!'

k. 'Here I am,' said Athene, striding purposefully forward. 'Listen, Paris, if you have enough common sense to award me the prize, I will make you victorious in all your battles, as well as the handsomest and wisest man in the world.'

'I am a humble herdsman, not a soldier,' said Paris. 'You can see for yourself that peace reigns throughout Lydia and Phrygia, and that King Priam's sovereignty is uncontested. But I promise to consider fairly your claim to the apple. Now you are at liberty to put on your clothes and helmet again. Is Aphrodite ready?'

l. Aphrodite sidled up to him, and Paris blushed because she came so close that they were almost touching.

'Look, carefully, please, pass nothing over. ... By the way, as soon as I saw you, I said to myself: 'Upon my word, there goes the handsomest young man in Phrygia! Why does he waste himself here in the wilderness herding stupid cattle?' " Well, why do you, Paris? Why not move into a city and lead a civilized life? What have you to lose by marrying someone like Helen of Sparta, who is as beautiful as I am, and no less passionate? I am convinced that, once you two have met, she will abandon her home, her family, everything, to become your mistress. Surely you have heard of Helen?'

'Never until now, my Lady. I should be most grateful if you would describe her.'

m. 'Helen, is of fair and delicate complexion, having been hatched from a swan's egg. She can claim Zeus for a father, loves hunting and wrestling, caused one war while she was still a child - and, when she came of age, all the princes of Greece were her suitors. At present she is married to Menelaus, brother of the High King Agamemnon; but that makes no odds - you can have her if you like.'

'How is that possible, if she is already married?'

'Heavens! How innocent you are! Have you never heard that it is my divine duty to arrange affairs of this sort? I suggest now that you tour Greece with my son Eros as your guide. Once you reach Sparta, he and I will see that Helen falls head over heels in love with you.'

'Would you swear to that?' Paris asked excitedly.

Aphrodite uttered a solemn oath, and Paris, without a second thought, awarded her the golden apple.

By this judgement he incurred the smothered hatred of both Hera and Athene, who went off arm-in-arm to plot the destruction of Troy; while Aphrodite, with a naughty smile, stood wondering how best to keep her promise.⁵

¹ Apollodorus: iii. 10. 8; Ovid: *Heroides* xvi. 51-2 and 359-60.

² Ovid: *Heroides* v. 12-30 and 139; Tzetzes: *On Lycophron* 57; Apollodorus: iii. 12.6.

³ *Trojanska Pricia* p. 159; Rawlinson: *Excidium Troiae*.

⁴ Ovid: *Heroides* xvi. 71-3 and v. 35-6; Lucian: *Dialogues of the Gods* 20; Hyginus: *Fabula* 92.

⁵ Hyginus: *loc. cit.*; Ovid: *Heroides* xvi. 149-52; Lucian: *loc. cit.*

n. Soon afterwards, Priam sent his servants to fetch a bull from Agelaus's herd. It was to be a prize at the funeral games now annually celebrated in honour of his dead son. When the servants chose the champion bull, Paris was seized by a sudden desire to attend the games, and ran after them. Agelaus tried to restrain him: 'You have your own private bull fights, what more do you want?' But Paris persisted and in the end, Agelaus accompanied him to Troy.

Robert Graves (1957, 1960) *The Greek Myths* in two volumes, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. pp.270-272.