

Reading Selection 16

The Trojan War is one of the most famous wars in history. It is well known for the ten-year duration, for the heroism of a number of legendary characters, and for the Trojan horse. What may not be familiar, however, is the story of how the war began.

According to Greek myth, the strife between the Trojans and the Greeks started at the wedding of Peleus, King of Thessaly, and Thetis, a sea nymph. All of the gods and goddesses had been invited to the wedding celebration in Troy except Eris, goddesses of discord. She had been omitted from the guest list because her presence always embroiled mortals and immortals alike in conflict.

To take revenge on those who had slighted her, Eris decided to cause a skirmish. Into the middle of the banquet hall, she threw a golden apple marked “for the most beautiful.” All of the goddesses began to haggle over who should possess it. The gods and goddesses reached a stalemate when the choice was narrowed to Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. Someone was needed to settle the controversy by picking a winner. The job eventually fell to Paris, son of King Priam of Troy, who was said to be a good judge of beauty.

Paris did not have an easy job. Each goddess, eager to win the golden apple, tried aggressively to bribe him.

“I’ll grant you vast kingdoms to rule,” promised Hera. “Vast kingdoms are nothing in comparison with my gift,” contradicted Athena. “Choose me and I’ll see that you win victory and fame in war.” Aphrodite outdid her adversaries, however. She won the golden

apple by offering Helen, Zeus' daughter and the most beautiful mortal, to Paris. Paris, anxious to claim Helen, set off for Sparta in Greece.

Although Paris learned that Helen was married, he accepted the hospitality of her husband, King Menelaus of Sparta, anyway. Therefore, Menelaus was outraged for a number of reasons when Paris departed, taking Helen and much of the king's wealth back to Troy. Menelaus collected his loyal forces and set sail for Troy to begin the war to reclaim Helen.

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