

“I Choose You”: Aphrodite and Paris in *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018)

Every episode of David Farr’s eight-hour Netflix series *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018) begins with a title card that proclaims: “Inspired by Homer and the Greek myths.” Among the most striking aspects of the series’ use of the ancient sources is its onscreen depiction of the Greek gods: although Wolfgang Petersen’s feature film *Troy* (2004) banished the major gods from its reels (with only a brief appearance by the sea goddess Thetis with her son Achilles), *Troy: Fall of a City* portrays several Olympian deities throughout its episodic arc – utilizing both theatrical and impressionistic imagery – including Zeus, Hermes, Artemis, Hera, Athena, and most prominently, Aphrodite. From the opening dramatization of the Judgment of Paris scene as the foundational myth of the Trojan War, to the closing sequence of the charred city in ruins, the onscreen presence of Aphrodite and her intimate engagement with her favorite Paris drives the main plot and serves as a compelling structural framework for the entire series.

This presentation explores the series’ depiction of Aphrodite (Lex King) and her intense relationship with Paris (Louis Hunter) through an analysis of several key scenes. In the first episode, “Black Blood,” the pre-title sequence of the ill-omened birth of Paris cuts immediately to the most crucial event of the young shepherd’s life: his deliberate selection of the goddess Aphrodite in the infamous Judgment. Even before the viewer catches a glimpse of Aphrodite – the first deity to appear onscreen in the series – Paris sees a wolf as he is drawn into the sacred grove on Mount Ida, “mother of beasts” (*Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 68): there a reluctant Hermes tells him he’s been chosen “to resolve a dispute.” Aphrodite, depicted as a pale willowy redhead clad in a deep green gown, touches Paris tenderly and reminds him, “You know me from your dreams.” From the moment Hermes pulls the burning golden apple from the campfire and hands it to Paris, who then bestows it upon the triumphant Aphrodite, the series underscores the

culpability of Paris and his choice of love as the direct cause of Troy's fiery downfall. Later in the same episode, the newly discovered Prince Paris celebrates his reintegration into the Trojan royal family, and in a drunken flash locks eyes with Aphrodite in the great hall – a quick cut shows the wolf darting into the palace as blood flows under the door. So from the very beginning of the series, the narrative, dialogue, and visual imagery function to bond Paris and Aphrodite together as the principal agents of the city's destruction.

Other scenes in the series reinforce their fateful attachment. In the second episode, "Conditions," Aphrodite joins Hera and Athena in a fantasy-league catalog of troops, as each calls out and "blesses" her champions arrayed on the battlefield. While Aphrodite names the Trojan warriors Aeneas and Hector – not Paris – she is then shown in an extraordinary long shot running in front of the Trojan line between the two armies, unequivocally emphasizing her agency in the conflict. The fourth episode, "Spoils of War," presents the famous *monomachia*, where Paris and Menelaus duel for the possession of Helen: the scene is intercut with flashback images of the Trojan high priest offering a white dove sacrifice at the birth of Paris, as the curse is revealed in the present day. When Menelaus knocks Paris down and is about to deliver the deathblow, Paris closes his eyes and Aphrodite appears, her voiceover urging him with the single word "Run." The series portrays Aphrodite as constantly acting to propel or even change the course of the plot: in the sixth episode, "Battle on the Beach," Aphrodite appears in a vivid simultaneous dream to Paris, Hector, and Hecuba, persuading them all that the curse is broken and the city is safe. Twice in the series, Aphrodite appeals to Zeus (Hakeem Kae-Kazim), at first caressing his face and sweetly coaxing him to spare Paris, "Forgive him... for me" (Episode 5, "Hunted"); later she remains defiant as she stands before the walls of Troy with Hera and Zeus, who sharply informs her even the gods are ruled by Fate (Episode 7, "Twelve Days"). Finally,

this presentation demonstrates how the series uses imagery and camera work in the last episode, “Offering,” to link the final appearance of Aphrodite to the two survivors Helen and Aeneas, even as she mourns the loss of her beloved Paris in the ruins of the Trojan palace. Aphrodite’s presence in the closing frames of the series links her thematically and visually to the “fall of the city,” while signaling her continuing involvement in any promised sequel.