

**Compare and Contrast the characters of Hektor and Paris**  
**and draw close character analysis of both of them.**

The Illiad is an ancient Greek epic poem which comprises of twenty-four books. It is believed to be composed in the 8th century BC. It describes the events of the Trojan War, a conflict between Greece and Troy that took place four centuries earlier. The initial cause of the Trojan War was the abduction of Helen, the queen of Sparta, by Paris, a Trojan prince. As the poem unfolds more and more is apparent as we are introduced to new characters, who we see develop in new situations. Distinctive characters are formed within the Illiad as Homer has made their importance and significance to the story apparent. Two such characters are Hektor and Paris, whom I am going to analyse thoroughly by referring to books three and six.

Paris is the son of King Priam and Queen Hecuba, and brother to Hektor. He is also referred to as Alexandros in the Illiad. In Book three we are first introduced to Paris very early on, on the battle field, just as the Achaians are approaching. He is described as “Alexandros the godlike”. Throughout the Illiad Homer uses many references to refer to Paris. He refers to Paris as “the hero”, as “godlike” and even as “son of Priam”. Homer also uses the same technique in reference to Hektor. Hektor is also the son of King Priam and Queen Hecuba as he is brother to Paris. Hektor is referred to as “the mightiest warrior in the Trojan army”. He is also referred to as “tall Hektor”, as “beloved of Zeus” and as “the slayer of men”. Although these references are insightful, they are vague. To understand these characters true personalities we must look closer at the text and the context in which they are present in.

Paris's character is apparent and definable from the context in book three alone. We learn a lot about him and how he is perceived, not just by his family, but also his people. Our first description of Paris in book three is in his armour as he is prepared for combat. He is described as "wearing across his shoulders the hide of a leopard, curved bow and sword; while in his hands shaking two javelins pointed with bronze." This brief description is insightful as we can deduct a lot about his personality just from his attire. The fact that Paris is intending to use a curved bow in combat is significant. A curved bow was seen as a cowardly means of fighting as it involves attacking from a safe distance, as no physical combat is therefore necessary. This suggests that Paris has no real intention of fighting appropriately but is just present for show. The fact Homer has described his attire in so much detail further exemplifies this. The leopard across his shoulders is symbolic of the great Herakles whom fought and killed a leopard as part of his twelve labours. Perhaps Homer is suggesting that although Paris may appear to be of the same physical stature as Herakles, he certainly doesn't possess the same courage and fighting ability. Paris's cowardly nature is then confirmed as "when he saw Menelaos showing among the champions, the heart was shaken within him; to avoid death he shrank into the host of his own companions".

Although we do not get a direct insight into Hektor's fighting capability in books three and six, he is constantly referred to as the "mightiest warrior of the Trojans" and "slayer of men". We do however get an insight into Hektor's leadership qualities, which Homer runs parallel and contrasts to Paris's gutless nature. After Hektor confronted Paris on the battlefield he confronted the rest of the Trojan and Greek

army to inform them of how the battle could be resolved. "Hektor hearing his word was happy and went into the space between and forced back the Trojan battalions holding his spear by the middle until they were all seated. But the flowing-haired Achaians kept pointing their bows at him with arrows and with flung stones striving ever to strike him". This point the situation is very perilous for Hektor as he is being attacked from all sides. Homer has to bring in Agamemnon to deal with the situation and calm his men down to hear what Hektor has to say. It is only after the men are calmed that we see Hektor's great leadership qualities as he sustains the attention of both sides of the army and clearly presents them with an ulterior way of resolving the war. This scene is interesting as Hektor is portrayed strangely in a heroic light. Here Hektor is being confronted by the entire Greek army yet doesn't stand down or hide away, he faces up to them in an attempt to get his message across. This situation mirrors Paris's, when he fled and hid on the battlefield because he confronted by just one warrior. Although Paris appears to possess greater strength and courage, it is actually Hektor who does. Homer has clearly distinguished a difference in character between the two brothers here.

Paris is portrayed as an effeminate character in comparison to the rest of the male characters in several ways. It has already been established that he is not a great warrior as he possesses no courage or strength. The degree of precision which Paris takes in putting on his armour is humorous as his vanity shines through. "First he placed along his legs the fair greaves linked with silver fastenings to hold the greaves at the ankles". Not only is the style in which he dresses himself effeminate but also the

extent of his armour. The fact that everything is trimmed with silver and that his helmet is “well-fashioned” illustrates this. The idea of Paris’s looks being his distinguishing characteristic is again exemplified when he is being referred to by Aphrodite. “Shining in his raiment and his own beauty; you would not think that he came from fighting against a man; you would think he was going rather to dance, or rested and had been dancing lately”. This description is very insightful as Homer is almost suggesting that Paris is only fit for and suitable for dancing, he is not made to fight, unlike his brother Hektor.

A great deal of information into Hektor’s character can be gathered from book six as this book revolves around him. Here we see Hektor in many lights as he interacts with several people. How a character is perceived by others in particular “close ones” is interesting as true accounts of them can be gathered. Within book six there are three particularly interesting interactions in which Hektor is involved. The first being with his mother Hecuba. When Hecuba caught sight of her son “she clung to his hand and called him by his name and spoke to him”. This shows great affection and a strong relationship between Hektor and his mother. We are automatically made aware of Hektor’s personal side which we have not before witnessed. We are then subjected to this side of Hektor yet again as Homer describes an endearing scene in book six with Hektor, his wife and son. In this scene we are all able to really see another side to Hektor’s character and are really made to sympathise with his situation. Like Hektor’s mother, his wife “came running to meet him”. This reiterates how popular and loved he is. When Hektor sees his son he “smiled in silence”, whereas his wife, Andromache, “stood close behind him, letting her tears fall.” This is a very

sentimental scene as Homer has painted a vivid picture of Hektor's family life. The sad element of the whole meeting is the fact that both Hektor and his wife know that this is the last time that they will ever be together. This is confirmed as Hektor earlier said to his mother "I must visit my beloved wife and my son, who is little, since I do not know of ever again I shall come this way". Also Andromache makes this terrible fate clear as she pleads with her husband to stay and instead fight the Greeks from inside the walls of Troy. The fact that Hector fights in his homeland, unlike any of the Achaean commanders, allows Homer to develop him as a tender, family-oriented man. Hector shows deep, sincere love for his wife and children and this is clearly apparent in this book. Hektor's relationship and attitude toward women and children is deeply embedded in Homeric culture.

Although Hector loves his family, he never loses sight of his responsibility to Troy. This is a very important characteristic of Hektor as it greatly contrasts that of Paris, who is known for not thinking before acting and whose fault it is that the whole war has occurred. Hektor always makes his duty and honour priority, as he doesn't allow anything or anyone to cloud his judgement. An example of this can be found when Hektor meets Hecuba. "My honoured mother, lift not to me the kindly sweet wine, for fear you stagger my strength and make me forget my courage". This idea is reiterated in Hektor and Andromache's meeting. "I would feel deep shame before the Trojans, and the Trojan women with trailing garments, if like a coward I were to shrink aside from the fighting; and the spirit will not let me, since I have learned to be valiant and to fight always among the foremost ranks of the Trojans, winning for my own self great glory, and for my father." The idea of honour is tied with the fact that Hektor is

also viewed as the future king of Troy, and as such, he already shows his responsibility to the community.

Paris's relationship with Helen greatly contrasts that with Hektor's and Andromache's. We are given an in-depth insight into Paris and Helen's relationship, as Helen talks openly about her feelings towards her husband to Hektor in book six. "I wish I had been the wife of a better man than this, one that knew modesty and all the things of shame that men say. But this man's heart is no steadfast thing, nor yet will it be so hereafter; for that I think he shall take the consequence". The harsh and crude way Helen refers to her husband greatly contrasts the endearing way Andromache refers to Hektor. It also illustrates how little, if any, love and respect Helen holds for her husband. Andromache wished her husband to stay with her and escape death, whereas Helen wishes her husband into war and death, as she feels he deserves it as it is the price he must pay for the fall of Troy.

Helen and Paris's relationship is also exploited by Homer in book three when Helen is talking to Aphrodite. Here we see how Helen views her husband and we get an insight into Paris's character on a personal level. "...but stay with him forever, and suffer for him, and look after him until he makes you his wedded wife, or makes you his slave girl. Not I. I am not going to him. It would be too shameful. I will not serve his bed, since the Trojan women hereafter would laugh at me." Here Helen is expressing her feelings on her marriage and her husband. She is making it clear that she no longer wishes to be Paris's wife and to love and support him, as she holds no respect for him, but instead is ashamed of him. This is a canny parallel to Hektor as he

highly regards his wife's reputation, and therefore wishes to honour her by being courageous in war. Here we see how different Hektor and Paris are in the way they think and act. Hektor's up most concern is that he dies an honorary death for the sake of his wife and son, whereas Paris doesn't appear to show any regard for his wife. Here we can draw a great distinction between the two brothers. Hektor is portrayed by Homer as the older more mature brother who shoulders all the responsibilities brought upon by his juvenial younger brother. Hektor's disregard for his wife, whether it be intentional or not, is reinforced by Helen. Helen suggests that living with Paris and being his wife is no different than being his slave. She clearly expresses the fact that he has brought shame upon her and his people, and that she no longer wants to be associated with him.

The concept of Paris bringing shame upon his 'loved ones' is strongly touched upon in relation to Paris and Hektor's relationship. Hektor holds such strong virtues which he feels are ridicules and destroyed by his brother. An example of Hektor's concern for virtue is evident when he rebukes Paris for kidnapping Helen, the act that perpetrated the war. He refers to Paris's act as "shameful" as he verbally attacks him. "Evil Paris, beautiful woman-crazy, cajoling, better had you never been born, or killed unwedded. Truly I could have wished it so; it would be far better that to have you with us to our shame, for others to sneer at". Paris' behaviour places Hektor in a dilemma: It is socially necessary for Hektor to protect Paris, but it is also morally and socially correct for him to rebuke him. Therefore, the heroic code binds Hektor into an uncomfortable position, which he struggles to deal with. Hektor reiterates his

resentment towards Paris in book six, “How I wish at this moment the earth might open beneath him...If only I could see him gone down to the house of the dead God, than I could say my heart had forgotten its joyless affliction”. The fact that Homer has mirrored this resentment and hatred of Paris into Helen as well is interesting as Paris is painted as a drastically different character than his brother, and this is known and thought of by all. In book three Helen’s resentment and hatred is made clear, “So you come back from fighting. Oh how I wish you had died there beaten down by the stronger man, who was once my husband”. This is a shocking thing for a wife to say to her husband in Homer’s time. The way in which Helen, his one pillar of support strikes him down makes the reader sympathise with Paris to a certain extent. The fact that Helen compares Paris with her last husband in such a crude way illustrates just how weak and pathetic Paris is, as he is ridiculed by the one person who is meant to ‘love’ him.

Upon close analysis of both Hektor and Paris much has been distinguished about their characters, how they viewed each other and how they are viewed by others. We learn how contrasting their morals, priorities and characteristics are despite being brother’s and being brought up in the same fashion. We are made to admire Hektor, but at the same time sympathise with him, while feeling ashamed for Paris. After all Helen was right when she said to Hektor, “It is on your heart beyond all that the hard work has fallen for the sake of dishonoured me and the blind act of Alexandros”. Through Hektor Homer has taught us that a character’s social status was mainly based upon his



performance in the battlefield. Throughout *The Iliad*, the heroic characters make decisions based on a definite set of principles, which are referred to as the "code of honour". Hektor clearly chose to follow the "code of honour", whereas Paris clearly chose not to.