

BARRIER AND TRANSCENDENCE: THE DOOR AND THE EAGLE IN *ILIAD* 24.314–21

The omen of the door and the eagle at *Iliad* 24.314–21 appears to have sparked scant scholarly interest, but deserves careful attention. The omen itself forms part of an analogy, for the eagle is likened in the size of its wingspan to a large, barred door. This simile might seem unremarkable, merely a convenient means of depicting great size, a casual juxtaposition of two ordinary nouns. The omen, on the whole, might be dismissed as nothing more than a conventional expression of divine favor. But closer scrutiny will reveal that there is, in fact, nothing arbitrary or haphazard in the selection of the terms of the analogy. Appreciation of the elegance and subtlety of the simile in turn reveals the full import of the omen.

The simile explicitly prefigures the concluding events in *Iliad* 24. But it also serves a more general function in the poem as a whole. It participates in the *Iliad*'s general preoccupation with physical barriers—both literal and figurative—and their transcendence. This preoccupation centers, paradoxically, on Hector, the foremost defender of the walls of Troy, and yet, the character most worried about crossing or unable to cross barriers in life and in death. In Hector's struggles, the poem depicts the human predicament itself in terms of physical barriers—to communication, to peaceful social existence, to immortality—and reveals the possibilities for transcendence. As an element in this pattern of emphasis, the simile of the door and the eagle cannot fully be understood outside it. The simile anticipates the ability of peaceful communication to transcend, briefly, the barriers dividing warring mortals. The omen augurs, ultimately, the unique ability of epic poetry to transcend the temporal limits of mortal existence.

In the last book of the *Iliad*, Priam is justifiably concerned about his ability to gain access to Achilles' camp and to ransom the body of Hector. Before setting out from Troy, he pours a libation to Zeus and prays for a favorable omen. Zeus complies, sending an eagle which flies through the city on the right:

"Ὡς ἔφατ' εὐχόμενος, τοῦ δ' ἔκλυε μητίετα Ζεὺς,
αὐτίκα δ' αἰετὸν ἦκε, τελειότατον πετεηνῶν,
μόρφον θηρητῆρ', ὃν καὶ περκνὸν καλέουσιν.
ὅσση δ' ὑψορόφοιο θύρῃ θαλάμοιο τέτυκται
ἀνέρος ἀφνειοῖο ἐν κληῖσ' ἀραρυῖα,
τόσσ' ἄρα τοῦ ἐκάτερθεν ἔσαν πτερὰ· εἶσατο δέ σφι
δεξιὸς αἰξας διὰ ἄστεος· οἱ δὲ ἰδόντες
γῆθησαν, καὶ πᾶσιν ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θυμὸς ἰάνθη.

(24.314–21)

So he spoke in prayer, and Zeus of the counsels heard him.
Straightway he sent down the most lordly of birds, an eagle,
the dark one, the marauder, called as well the black eagle.
And as big as is the build of the door to a towering chamber
in the house of a rich man, strongly fitted with bars, of such size
was the spread of his wings on either side. He swept through the city
appearing on the right hand, and the people looking upon him
were uplifted and the hearts made glad in the breasts of all of them.¹

The passage reflects the ancient conception of birds as creatures in direct contact with the divine realm. Birds' ability to fly and their speed of flight contrast with the poverty

¹ Translations of the *Iliad* are from R. Lattimore, *The Iliad* (Chicago, 1951). I have taken the liberty of making a few very minor changes.

of human physical abilities and suggest a link to that which is unknown. Ancient religious traditions saw in the paradoxical combination of freedom of movement with a certain regularity of behavior, the possibility that birds might be messengers from gods to men.²

The Homeric epics are laden with symbolic messages, both from the gods to the characters and from the poet to the audience. The manifestations of birds are but one type of symbolic message; similes are another. And, in general, physical objects and incidents regularly contain complex symbolic significance. Sometimes this significance is explicitly expressed; sometimes the characters and/or the hearers (or readers) of the poem are left to intuit it.³ In the case of similes, the correspondence between simile and context is not limited to a single function or point of comparison. The relationship is, rather, multiple and complex.⁴ Bird signs function in the same way that similes do.⁵ But whereas the sign requires an act of interpretation from the characters in the poem,⁶ the simile requires an act of interpretation from the hearers (or readers) of the poem. We must interpret a simile in the same way that an epid bird seer interprets an omen.⁷ The traditional poetic language, however, evokes elements contained in the social memory that is shared by the poet and his audience but not by us, that is, all Homeric similes, including the longer ones, are, in a sense 'condensed'.⁸ Our only hope for comprehending the significance of Homeric similes lies in exploring the connotations of the terms contained in the analogies, by examining and comparing other passages in which these terms occur in the narrative, in similes, or in omens. The complexity of Homeric symbolic thought indicates that, for modern readers, as for the characters themselves, the danger lies not in over-interpretation but in under-interpretation, that is in failing to appreciate the full implications of Homeric symbols.⁹

Interpretation of the omen in *Iliad* 24.314–21 seems, at first, deceptively simple. For Priam, the message is straightforward. Appearing on the right, the eagle must signify the success of the journey that Priam is about to undertake.¹⁰ But because the description contains a simile, the omen becomes, for the audience, though not for Priam, more like those extended omens of no obvious meaning that require an act of interpretation.¹¹

² For a discussion with further bibliography, see A. Schnapp-Gourbeillon, *Lions, héros masques: les représentations de l'animal chez Homère* (Paris, 1981), pp. 185–90. See also R. W. Bushnell, 'Reading "Winged Words": Homeric Bird Signs, Similes, and Epiphanes', *Helios* 9 (1982), 1–13 and W. C. Scott, 'The Oral Nature of the Homeric Simile', *Mnemosyne* Suppl. 28 (Leiden, 1974), pp. 77–9.

³ J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 1–24.

⁴ M. Coffey, 'The Homeric Simile', *AJP* 78 (1957), 117. Coffey is following the view of H. Fränkel, *Die homerischen Gleichnisse* (Göttingen, 1921, reprinted 1977). N. Austin explains the simile as 'a composite picture, an assimilation of one unified structure into another' (*Archery at the Dark of the Moon* [Berkeley, 1975], p. 115). B. Snell notes that Homer's similes 'constitute his only mechanism of describing the essence or the intensity of an event' (*The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought*, translated by T. G. Rosenmeyer [Cambridge, 1953], pp. 199–200).

⁵ R. W. Bushnell, *Helios* 9 (1982), 8–10.

⁶ N. Austin, op. cit., p. 118.

⁷ L. Muellner, 'The Simile of the Cranes and Pygmies: A Study of Homeric Metaphor', *HSCP* 93 (1990), 98–9.

⁸ L. Muellner, *HSCP* 93 (1990), 66.

⁹ N. Austin, op. cit., p. 129.

¹⁰ In Homer, the conventional code for interpreting bird signs is that the bird's appearance on the right signifies success for the enterprise about to be undertaken, while appearance on the left signifies failure (R. W. Bushnell, *Helios* 9 [1982], 2).

¹¹ For a distinction between these two types of omens, that is, between 'signe' and 'présage', see A. Schnapp-Gourbeillon, op. cit., p. 179.

Moreover, as the only instance in either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* in which a bird forms the tenor of a simile rather than the vehicle,¹² the description of the omen explicitly places the audience in the role of the *μάντις* who must interpret the significance of the analogy in order to understand the full implications of the omen.

To the would-be *μάντις*, the choice of a *θύρη* for the analogy seems somewhat arbitrary. The way in which an eagle's wings open and fold may suggest the hinge of a door, and doors, like wings, generally come in pairs. (Possibly the singular *θύρη* here stands for the plural.) But the stated connection between tenor and vehicle is the great size of both. If, however, the purpose of the analogy were merely to depict great size, many other objects might serve just as well. And greatness of size is not, in itself, a central or defining characteristic of birds. Elsewhere in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, other eagles are referred to as large, but the fact of their size is not stressed. Eagles of omen do tend to be big. For example, a *μέγας αἰετός* 'great eagle' appears to Penelope in her dream (*Od.* 19.538), and an *αἰετὸς ὑψιπέτης* 'high-flying eagle' appears on the Achaeans' right in response to Aias' challenge to Hector (*Il.* 13.822). Similarly, the eagle carrying a fawn at *Il.* 8.247–8 is, presumably, a rather large bird. But these examples contain no extended description or simile. The attribute of great size appears to attend rather than to define these birds' ominous function.

Moreover, great size is never the attribute figured in bird similes. In both epics, birds are used in similes to depict epiphanies, or warriors attacking, or to convey parallels of sound, motion, or posture.¹³ Their flight figures speed (e.g. *Il.* 2.764 and *Od.* 7.36) and agility (e.g. *Il.* 21.252). Their eyes depict keenness of sight (e.g. *Il.* 17.674). Their cries figure emotive qualities of sound (e.g. *Od.* 11.605 and 16.216).¹⁴ But never is size the focal point of the comparison. This eagle, particularized by its great size, is an especially unusual bird. In a bird of omen, great size must signify great power, great potential. But, in this case, potential for what exactly?

In addition, a door, a man-made object, is essentially an unusual choice for the vehicle of a simile. Indeed, this simile may be distinguished from other Homeric similes in that, in this instance, the tenor comes from the world of nature, while the vehicle is drawn from the world of human beings. One would expect the reverse: in general, Homeric similes attempt to illuminate human life by analogizing it to patterns in nature.¹⁵ Instead, here a natural phenomenon is brought into relation with

¹² I am following M. S. Silk in his understanding of the distinction introduced by I. A. Richards. Silk explains 'tenor' as the underlying idea in a poetic image and 'vehicle' as 'the other idea, the one brought in from outside, the one to which the tenor is, in logical terms, compared' (*Interaction in Poetic Imagery: With Special Reference to Early Greek Poetry* [London, 1974], p. 6). L. Muellner, examining the relationship between tenor and vehicle in Homer, cites the conclusion of H. Fränkel: 'nur Einmalig-Geschichtliches bleibt dem Gleichnissen fern' (Muellner, *HSCP* 93 [1990], 72–3). Muellner explains that 'in contrast to the events that the heroes take part in, which are "einmalig-geschichtlich," the similes portray only recurrent events.' Muellner observes that 'the conventional relationship between tenor and vehicle in epic is like that between the generation of men and the generation of leaves: individual men die, but trees never cease losing their leaves in season. Yet on another level, while the events in the epic are, for the heroes, one-time, unrepeatable events that lead to inevitable death, for us, they are *κλέος ἄφθιτον*, because, like an event in a simile, they are performed again and again' (Muellner, *HSCP* 93 [1990], 96).

¹³ W. C. Scott, *Mnemosyne* Suppl. 28 [Leiden, 1974], pp. 77–9.

¹⁴ G. Nagy discusses the call of the crane in Hesiod, *Works and Days* 450–1 and its significance as a *σῆμα* ('*Sēma* and *Noēsis*: Some Illustrations', *Arethusa* 16 [1983], 44–5 and n. 27).

¹⁵ N. Austin argues that the Homeric simile 'attempts to make visible the human order by finding a correspondence between it and the order of nature.' He observes that 'Vergil's simile

a work of human beings.¹⁶ Combined with the unusual emphasis on size, the reversal of the traditional pattern suggests that the point of this analogy is not similarity or harmony but difference. If one were to try to re-cast the simile in a more predictable mold, a typical format might be something such as: 'the door was so large that not even Zeus' mighty eagle had a wingspan that was greater in size.' But even this is awkward. 'The door was so high that not even Zeus' mighty eagle could fly higher' has an epic ring, and while it is hardly plausible, it gets closer to the essence of the comparison: birds fly; barred doors impede passage. Although in the analogy the two are equated in size, the defining characteristic of each element indicates not similarity but contrast, even opposition.

Arguably, other eagle omens in the *Iliad* suggest—to varying degrees—this same opposition. In the *Odyssey*, eagles (in omens and dreams) have a consistent function, relating to Odysseus' return and vengeance and the justice of his ultimate triumph.¹⁷ But the *Iliad* is not a poem about homecoming and revenge. If eagles have a consistent function in this poem, one can expect it to differ from their function in the *Odyssey*. Eagles of omen in the *Iliad*—and there are only three others—allude, directly or indirectly, to the contrast between the flight of a bird and a man-made barrier. In each instance, the appearance of an eagle signifies the success or failure that will result from the immediate or subsequent crossing of such a barrier. In *Iliad* 8, the Achaeans are penned between their own ships and the ditch they have dug as a defense against the onslaught of the Trojans. Zeus responds to Agamemnon's prayer, sending an eagle, which gives the Achaeans the courage to cross the ditch once more and engage the Trojans in combat (*Il.* 8.245–55). In *Iliad* 12, the Trojans are eager to smash the Achaeans' fortifications and set fire to their ships. An eagle appears to Hector and Poulydamas as they hesitate to cross the Achaeans' ditch. Appearing on the left and forced to drop the snake that it holds, the eagle signifies to the Trojans that their endeavor will not ultimately be successful, but Hector rejects Poulydamas' interpretation and proceeds to lead the assault (*Il.* 12.200–64).¹⁸ In *Iliad* 13, an eagle appears, on the right, in response to Aias' boast that long before the Trojans manage to destroy the Achaeans' ships, the Achaeans will sack Troy utterly (*Il.* 13.809–23). Although no specific barrier is mentioned, and although the events signified by this omen are delayed, the omen does portend the Greeks' eventual successful destruction of the wall of Troy. Undeniably, in these three passages, the contrast between eagles and barriers receives no particular emphasis. (In *Iliad* 8, for example, the ditch is mentioned at 213.) But, as our only other clues to the function of eagles of omen in

comparing the uncontrolled winds to a frenzied human mob (*Aen.* 1.148–54) sharply emphasizes the change in perspective between Homer and his successors. In the perspective of the Homeric simile the human world receives its pattern from that already established in the natural world.' Austin contrasts Homeric similes with modern poetry, which works in the opposite way, tending to endow natural phenomena with human qualities (Austin, op. cit., pp. 116–18).

¹⁶ Elsewhere in Homer, human actions do, at times, figure not natural phenomena but other human actions. Often, warlike activity is brought into relation with domestic activities of times of peace. See, for example, *Iliad* 12.421–6 and 16.212–14.

¹⁷ C. Moulton, *Similes in the Homeric Poems*, Hypomnemata 49 (Göttingen, 1977), pp. 135–9. Moulton argues that in the *Odyssey* this is true of bird imagery in general. See also the corroborating arguments of L. A. Losada, 'Odyssey 21.411: The Swallow's Call', *CP* 80 (1985), 33–4 and E. K. Borthwick, 'Odysseus and the Return of the Swallow', *G&R* 35 (1988), 14–22. N. Austin notes the association of swallows with the annual return of spring. He identifies the swallow's song of Odysseus' bow as the first sign of spring and a favorable omen for the coming year (Austin, op. cit., pp. 247–50).

¹⁸ For a discussion of Hector's misreading of bird signs, see R. W. Bushnell, *Helios* 9 (1982), 5–13.

this poem, the three passages, taken together, may begin to delineate the context in which the eagle of omen in *Iliad* 24 must be understood.¹⁹

In any case, the contrast between an eagle and a barrier seems more marked in the omen in *Iliad* 24. Equating the size of the wingspan of an eagle with the size of a door only emphasizes the attendant differences between the two objects. Then, too, the fact that the eagle is the tenor and the door the vehicle, a reversal of the traditional pattern, suggests that the import of the analogy may be found in the opposition between the two terms. What barrier or barriers, then, might be represented by the well-barred doorway in the simile in *Iliad* 24? The door in the analogy could, possibly, represent the safety of the immense palace that Priam is leaving behind,²⁰ but for that purpose one might legitimately expect an open door rather than one so emphatically shut. Rather, the simile elegantly anticipates the difficulty the audience may expect Priam to have entering—and leaving—Achilles' αὐλή. The analogy adds dramatic tension by pre-figuring the description of Achilles' θύρη:

θύρην δ' ἔχε μῶνος ἐπιβλήης
εἰλάτινος, τὸν τρεῖς μὲν ἐπιρρήσσεσκον Ἀχαιοί,
τρεῖς δ' ἀναούεσκον μεγάλην κληῖδα θυράων
τῶν ἄλλων· Ἀχιλεὺς δ' ἄρ' ἐπιρρήσσεσκε καὶ οἶος·

(24.453–6)

The door was secured by a single door-piece
of pine, and three Achaeans could ram it home in its socket
and three could pull back and open the huge door-bar, three other
Achaeans, that is, but Achilles all by himself could close it.

While the description emphasizes the disparity between Achilles' strength and that of other men, it also underscores Achilles' physical inaccessibility. Indeed, in order for

¹⁹ One may contrast the omen Athena sends as a favorable sign to Odysseus and Diomedes as they are about to set out on their night raid. Athena sends a heron (*Il.* 10.274–5). Here no barrier-crossing is at issue: the Greeks hold their conclave after crossing their own ditch. But this detail risks seeming somewhat contrived. Diomedes and Odysseus are selected and they arm themselves *outside* of the Greek fortifications. Both need to borrow equipment, having left their own beside their ships. Surely it would be more logical to make the selection within the camp where each warrior would have his own weapons handy. Odysseus and Diomedes would then need to cross the ditch before setting out on their expedition. It is tempting to conclude that placement of the conclave outside of the Greek fortifications is a simple, if logically questionable, means of precluding the need for an eagle of omen presaging a favorable crossing of a boundary. For the eagle is not Athena's sacred bird. It is Zeus' (see, for example, *Il.* 24.292–3). It is the creature Zeus uses when he wishes to communicate with human beings, reserving Iris and Hermes for messages to the gods (J. Pollack, *Birds in Greek Life and Myth* [Plymouth, 1977], pp. 141–3). Iris can also bring messages to men. In this capacity she is sent to Achilles not by Zeus but by Hera (*Il.* 18.166). When Zeus wishes to restore Hector's strength and courage after he has been hit in the chest with a boulder, he sends as his messenger Apollo in the guise of a hawk (*Il.* 15.236–41). Here, too, no boundary crossing is at issue. But in *Iliad* 10, Zeus is favoring the Trojans (for Thetis' sake). Admittedly, the absence of an eagle of omen in *Iliad* 10 does not prove that the eagle alone can presage a barrier crossing. Nevertheless, the eagles of omen that do appear in this poem all consistently presage the success or failure of the crossing of a barrier.

²⁰ M. Lynn-George, *Epos: Word, Narrative and the Iliad* (Basingstoke and London, 1988), p. 235. Lynn-George also maintains that the eagle signifies separation from the city and that the two together underline the 'fluctuations between assurance and uncertainty, security and exposure, trust and threat' which recur repeatedly in Priam's journey. But he also argues that, in the simile at 24.480–2, Achilles is, by implication, 'the man of wealth/substance' (p. 239). The latter point would tend to support my contention that the locked door of a wealthy man at 24.317–18 represents Achilles' door more than Priam's. But, in fact, we have no real dispute. Both the door in its positive, protective aspect and in its negative, divisive aspect may well be at issue here.

Priam to enter, a god must assist him. Hermes does so (24.457), and Achilles recognizes this, saying

καὶ δέ σε γινώσκω, Πρίαμε, φρεσὶν, οὐδέ με λήθεις,
ὅττι θεῶν τίς σ' ἤγε θοᾶς ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν.
οὐ γάρ κε τλαίῃ βροτὸς ἐλθέμεν, οὐδέ μάλ' ἥβων,
ἐς στρατόν· οὐδέ γάρ ἂν φυλάκους λάθοι, οὐδέ κ' ὄχηα
ρεία μετοχλίσσειε θυράων ἡμετεράων.

(24.563–7)

I know you, Priam, in my heart, and it does not escape me
that some god led you to the running ships of the Achaeans.
For no mortal would dare come to our encampment, not even
one strong in youth. He could not get by the pickets, he could not
lightly unbar the bolt that secures our doorway.

Like the description of the door in the simile, the description of Achilles' door mentions only one intrinsic feature, the *κληίς* 'bolt' or 'door-bar'. The door in the simile, *ἐν κληῖσ' ἀραρυῖα* 'well-fitted with a bolt' (24.318), anticipates Achilles' *θύρη* with its *μεγάλη κληίς* (24.455). This defining element underscores the doors' function as barriers.

The opening of Achilles' door permits the beginning of communication between Achilles and Priam, the beginning of a resolution—not to the conflict as a whole, but to their personal conflict. The *θύρη* in the simile at 24.317–19 is the door to the room of a rich man, the man who has the most to protect, and, therefore, the greatest need for the strongest of barriers between himself and any potential thief. The image serves as a graphic reminder not only of Achilles' present inaccessibility but also of the isolation he imposed on himself earlier in the poem. On one level, then, the great size of the eagle and the great size of the door depict the immensity of the effort at communication that Priam is making and the immensity of the barrier to it.

But the image is richly laden: in addition to anticipating Achilles' *θύρη*, the *θύρη* in the simile also recalls other crucial barriers in the poem. As the obstacle to Hector's burial, Achilles' *θύρη* is only a continuation of the symbolic obstacles which Hector faces in life. For Hector, more than any other character in the *Iliad*, finds himself continually struggling against physical barriers. These barriers define his relationship to his enemies, to his people, and to his own mortality.

As Troy's foremost fighter, Hector is, ostensibly, the defender of gates and walls, *οἷος γὰρ ἐρύετο Ἴλιον Ἔκτωρ* 'since Hector alone saved Ilion' (6.403). His name itself is derived from the verb *ἔχω* in the sense of 'protect'. In *Iliad* 24.729–30 and 5.473–4, the verb makes explicit Hector's role as the protector of Troy and its inhabitants.²¹ And yet, he is the warrior most frequently shown in confrontation, either literally or figuratively, with physical barriers—walls, towers, gates. He is the only warrior in the poem ever to fight against opponents who have been drawn up *πυργηδόν* 'like a tower' (i.e. in solid masses). The word occurs three times in the poem, always in relation to warriors who are opposing Hector (12.43, 13.152, and 15.618).

Hector is also the only character in the poem ever directly in conflict with a metaphorical *ἔρκος*. Whenever this word is used of warriors or their armor in battle (seven times), it never depicts Trojans, only Achaeans.²² Four times the opponent is

²¹ G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore, 1979), pp. 146–7.

²² And, once, a goddess: Aphrodite, protecting Aeneas, uses her *πέπλος* to create a *ἔρκος* against arrows (*Il.* 5.316).

not specifically named. Thus, Achilles is called ἔρκος Ἀχαιοῖσιν (1.284), Aias is twice called ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν (3.229, and 6.5), and a group of footsoldiers are ἔρκος πολέμοιο (4.299). The other three instances, however, refer specifically to Hector's immediate opponents. Aias, selected by lot to fight in single combat against Hector, is again called ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν (7.211). The Achaeans, defending their ships against Hector and Melanippus, fence around their ships in a ἔρκος of bronze (15.567). The shield of Periphetes is a ἔρκος ἀκόντων. When Periphetes trips over it, he hands κύδος to Hector by enabling Hector to kill him (15.646).

Hector's single combat against Aias in *Iliad* 7 amply illustrates the effect of such imagery. Described as ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν (7.211), Aias carries his σάκος like a πύργος (7.219). And, in this confrontation, Aias does, in fact, function as a ἔρκος for his people. His shield remains an impenetrable πύργος. By contrast, Hector's shield does not.²³ The imagery thus presages Hector's ultimate inability to defend the walls and towers of Troy.

But the ἔρκος is not the wall of a besieged city, nor even a wall separating two opposing armies. As the barrier to the αὐλή, the ἔρκος seems to be that which separates the private residence from the rest of the community.²⁴ Used metaphorically to depict embattled warriors, the word ἔρκος serves as a reminder that the struggle between opposing armies is, in fact, a conflict between members of the same human community.

Even so, one might expect the imagery of walls and towers to describe not Hector's opponents but those of Achilles, the foremost attacker of the city of Troy. But the *Iliad* concludes before the sack of Troy and does not narrate this most momentous event directly. Instead, the poem is suffused with reverse imagery which depicts Troy's destruction indirectly. The most notable example of this, perhaps, is the Trojan assault of the Achaean fortifications in *Iliad* 12.²⁵ In this assault, Hector confronts most conspicuously not the ἔρκος, but the τεῖχος, the wall which separates two opposing armies. In *Iliad* 7, the Achaeans construct a defensive τεῖχος with πύργοι ὑψηλοί 'high towers' and πύλαι εὖ ἀραρυῖαι 'well-joined gates' (7.436ff.). In *Iliad* 12 the raging battle at this wall suggests a battle about a besieged city, and the failure of the Achaean τεῖχος and πύλαι to withstand the Trojan assault, foretells the eventual destruction of the τεῖχος and πύλαι of Troy.²⁶ Hector is the first to break into the Achaean τεῖχος and to burst in the πύλαι (12.437–71). Even as he does this,

²³ The description of the fight is deliberately repetitive: Hector hurls his spear but is unable to penetrate Aias' shield; Aias hurls his spear all the way through Hector's shield (7.244–54). Hector then stabs at Aias' shield but fails to penetrate it; Aias succeeds in stabbing through Hector's shield (7.257–62). Hector then throws a stone but is unable to break Aias' shield; Aias throws a stone and shatters Hector's shield (7.264–72).

²⁴ This is the case in civilized societies. It is worth noting that the cave of Polyphemos, in *Odyssey* 9, although it has an αὐλή (184, 239, 338, 462), θύραι (243, 417) and even a θυρεός (240, 340), has no ἔρκος.

²⁵ In much the same way, Patroclus' death in *Iliad* 16 may be seen as a depiction of Achilles' death, which is never literally shown. See R. Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, Volume IV: Books 13–16 (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 408–17.

²⁶ S. Scully, *Homer and the Sacred City* (Ithaca, 1990), pp. 44–5. And see also M. Lynn-George, op. cit., p. 260. The eventual destruction of Troy is further emphasized by the fact that the foremost attackers, lead by Sarpedon and Glaukos, are the Λύκιοι (12.290–330). In the Homeric epics and elsewhere in archaic Greek poetry, the Λύκος invariably symbolizes qualities antithetical to civilization. For a discussion of the symbolic range of Λύκος, and for further bibliography, see G. Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca, 1990, reprinted 1992, with corrections), p. 272, n. 13. See also E. K. Anhalt, *Solon the Singer: Politics and Poetics* (Lanham, MD, 1993), pp. 128–48.

lifting and hurling a stone so huge that no two men οἶοι νῦν βροτοί εἰσι ‘such as men are now’ (12.449) could have lifted it, he is likened not to a marauder, but to a shepherd, for

ὥς δ’ ὅτε ποιμὴν ρεία φέρει πόκον ἄρσενος οἷδς
χειρὶ λαβὼν ἑτέρῃ, δλίγον τέ μιν ἄχθος ἐπείγει,
ὥς Ἐκτωρ ἰθὺς σανίδων φέρε λᾶαν αἰείρας,

(12.451–3)

As when a shepherd easily carries the fleece of a wether,
picking it up with one hand, and little is the burden weighting him,
so Hector lifting the stone carried it straight for the door leaves.

In portraying the foremost defender of the wall of Troy as the chief aggressor—against *πύργοι*, against *ἔρκεα*, against *τείχεα*, against *πύλαι*—the poem emphasizes the essential duality of man-made barriers. If the *τείχος* can be symbolic of the fragile boundary between civilization and its annihilation (in the case of the Trojan wall),²⁷ such barriers are also and simultaneously divisive. They often pose impediments to communication, to social harmony. They invite violence rather than peaceful interaction.

Indeed, until *Iliad* 24, much emphasis throughout the poem has been on *πύλαι* separating opposing armies, and on violent physical assault of them or the possibility of it.²⁸ The simile at 24.317–19 focuses attention on a different, more intimate sort of barrier, a closed, well-barred *θύρη*. Prior to *Iliad* 24, the figure of Hector is associated with violent, forced entry. His destruction of the Achaean *πύλαι* in *Iliad* 12 serves as a foil for Priam’s later peaceful penetration of Achilles’ *θύρη*. Hector, like Priam, is assisted by a god, and the description of the Achaean *πύλαι*, even as they are about to be smashed, emphasizes the same solidity and apparent impenetrability we have seen in the *θύρη* in the simile at 24.317–19 and in the description of Achilles’ *θύρη* (24.453–6 and 564–7), for

Ἐκτωρ ἰθὺς σανίδων φέρε λᾶαν αἰείρας,
αἶ ῥα πύλας εἵρυντο πύκα στιβαρῶς ἀραρυίας,
δικλίδας ὑψηλάς· δοιοὶ δ’ ἔντοσθεν ὀχῆες
εἶχον ἐπημοιβοί, μία δὲ κληῖς ἐπαρτήρει.

(12.453–6)

²⁷ S. Scully explains that although the purpose of the Achaeans is to fight at the city wall, only Patroclus ever scales it. No one else even touches it. And the Trojans never fight from it either. This ‘enhances the wall’s symbolic value, encouraging us to read the circuit wall, untouched by war, as the boundary between war and peace, between the wild (nature) and culture, between the life-taking and the life-sustaining ... Although the wall of Troy may be secure within the frame of the *Iliad*, we are equally aware from the stories of other walled cities that have fallen, from the failure of the Achaean wall to withstand Trojan aggression, and from the many prefigurations of Troy’s own fall, that this boundary between civilization and its annihilation is a fragile one’ (Scully, op. cit., pp. 44–5). And see also M. B. Arthur, ‘The Divided World of *Iliad* VI’. In *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, H. P. Foley (ed.) (New York, 1981), pp. 19–44. Arthur understands the Scaean gates as marking the separation between the city and the battlefield. She argues that in the meeting of Andromache and Hector in *Iliad* 6, the opposition between the feminine and masculine worlds figures the opposition between the city and the battlefield. Arthur maintains that *Iliad* 6 both emphasizes the opposition between the two spheres and explores the interaction between them, ultimately affirming the continuity of the two realms.

²⁸ Scully, discussing the importance of the city wall in the *Iliad*, notes that ‘all dramatic scenes that concern the welfare of Troy are staged either upon the wall or at the city gates, not within the city at Priam’s palace or Athena’s temple’ (Scully, op. cit., p. 42) and that ‘the city wall at the Skaian Gate, more than palace or city temple, is the single most prominent feature of Homeric Troy’ (Scully, op. cit., p. 44).

Hector lifting the stone carried it straight for the door leaves which filled the gateway ponderously close-fitted together. These were high and twofold, and double door-bars on the inside overlapping each other closed it, and a single pin-bolt secured them.

Just as the *κληίς* served as the defining element both of Achilles' *θύρη* (24.455) and of the *θύρη* in the simile (24.318), here, too, the *κληίς* defines the barrier function of the *πύλαι* (12.456). Although *κληίς* can, at times, be synonymous with *ὄχῃες*, the presence of the *κληίς* in these three passages is particularly striking because the word figures in the descriptions of only two other doors in the poem, and, arguably, neither of the two is a secular human barrier.²⁹ The *κληίς* of Achilles' *θύρη* is mentioned just two lines before Hermes opens the door for Priam. The *κληίς* of the Achaean *πύλαι* is not mentioned at the time of their construction in *Iliad* 7. It is only mentioned at the moment of their destruction in *Iliad* 12 (12.456).³⁰ The very presence of the *κληίς* in the simile at 24.317–19 may itself indicate the imminence of a barrier crossing.

But Hector's mode of entry in *Iliad* 12 contrasts powerfully with Priam's later entrance through Achilles' *θύρη*, for

στῇ δὲ μάλ' ἐγγὺς ἰὼν, καὶ ἐρεισάμενος βάλε μέσσας,
εὖ διαβάς, ἵνα μὴ οἱ ἀφαιρότερον βέλος εἴη,
ῥῆξε δ' ἀπ' ἀμφοτέρους θαιρούς· πέσσε δὲ λίθος εἴσω
βριθοσύνῃ, μέγα δ' ἀμφὶ πύλαι μύκον, οὐδ' ἄρ' ὄχῃες
ἐσχεθέτην, σανίδες δὲ διέτμαγεν ἄλλυδις ἄλλη
λαὸς ὑπὸ ριπῆς.

(12.457–62)

He came and stood very close and taking a strong wide stance threw at the middle, leaning into the throw, that the cast might not lack force, and smashed the hinges at either side, and the stone crashed ponderously in, and the gates groaned deep, and the door-bars could not hold, but the leaves were smashed to a wreckage of splinters under the stone's impact.

In contrast, Priam's entrance through Achilles' *θύρη* is so peaceful that it is almost anti-climactic, since

δῆ ῥα τόθ' Ἑρμείας ἐριούνιος ὦξε γέροντι,
ἐς δ' ἄγαγε κλυτὰ δῶρα ποδώκεϊ πηλείωνι,

(24.457–8)

At this time Hermes, the kind god, opened [the door] for the old man and brought in the glorious gifts for Peleus' son, the swift-footed.

Mention of the *κληίς* in the descriptions of just three human barriers in the poem reinforces the connection between the *θύρη* in the simile at 24.317–19, Achilles's *θύρη*, and the *πύλαι* embodying the conflict between Trojans and Achaeans. The contrast between Hector's violent confrontation with *πύλαι* (as well as with *πύργοι*, *ἔρκεα*, and *τείχεα*), and Priam's peaceful penetration of Achilles' *θύρη* reveals the possibility

²⁹ At the temple of Athena in Troy, the door of the sacred chamber containing Athena's robe must be opened with a *κληίς* (6.89). And the door to Hera's chamber on Olympus is shut with a *κληίς* (14.168). There is no mention of the *κληίς* in regard to Priam's *θύραι* or the Skaian *πύλαι*, the *πύλαι* of Hades or those of Olympus.

³⁰ The *Odyssey*, by contrast, contains many more domestic scenes and, therefore, more descriptions of doors. Most of these descriptions contain a *κληίς* or the verb *κληίω*. Although the *κληίς* can occur in the sense of 'key' in the context of the opening of a door (for example, *Od.* 21.6 and 47), for the most part, the noun in the *Odyssey* underscores shutting a door or keeping it shut (*Od.* 1.442 and 21.241, for example). This can be expressed by the noun and verb together (*Od.* 21.241) or by the verb alone (*Od.* 21.236, 382, 387; 19.30).

of a new mode of transcendence distinct from the violent barrier crossings that have preceded, the possibility of peaceful penetration through communication, mutual understanding, sympathy.

If the *θύρη* points both forward to Achilles' *θύρη* and backward to the obstacles Hector confronts throughout the poem, raising the possibility of social concord through peaceful transcendence of such barriers, it also evokes another barrier which defines the condition of being mortal. Priam's successful supplication, his successful passage through a well-barred doorway assures the proper burial of Hector's body. Burial itself marks a two-fold passage. It permits the warrior's *ψυχή* to pass through the *πύλαι* of Hades to dwell among the dead (see, for example, *Il.* 23.69–74).³¹ At the same time, the *σῆμα*, by serving as a memorial for generations to come, may enable the warrior's *κλέος* to transcend the limits of time (see, for example, *Il.* 7.76–91). The well-barred door in the simile at *Iliad* 24.317–19, in representing the obstacle to Hector's burial, thus symbolizes both the barrier to the passage of his *ψυχή* through the gates of Hades and the barrier to the eternal survival of his *κλέος*. As such, it represents not only Achilles' intransigence and the violent discord between Trojans and Achaeans, but also the limits presented by the very conditions of mortal existence.

In this respect, too, the *θύρη* evokes images of other limits in the poem. As well as symbolizing the divisions between human combatants, physical barriers in the *Iliad* also symbolize the great barriers between mortal and immortal existence. Throughout the poem, such barriers regularly mark metaphysical distinctions. The *πύλαι* of Olympus separate the realm of the gods from the realm of men (8.393, for example), as the *πύλαι* of Hades separate the underworld from the human realm (9.312, for example). In death, the *ψυχή* leaves the body by crossing the *ἔρκος ὁδόντων* (9.409, for example). This imagery envisions the distinct realms—divine, mortal, posthumous—in terms of concrete, spatial separations.

The use of the word *κλήϊς* in the simile as well as in the descriptions of Achilles's *θύρη* and of the *πύλαι* of the Greek fortifications in *Iliad* 12, enhances the sense of *θύρη* and *πύλαι* as barriers separating the realm of the living from that of the dead. For *κλήϊς* also has the meaning 'collar-bone'. In this sense, the *κλήϊς* marks the spot which is *μάλιστα δὲ καίριος* 'most fatal' (8.326). Hector, clad in the armor he stripped from Patroclus, is exposed and vulnerable only at his *κλήϊδες* 'collar-bones', the spot where *ψυχῆς ὥκιστος ὀλεθρος* 'destruction of life comes most swiftly' (22.324–5). And it is in this spot that Achilles strikes the mortal blow (22.326–7). With only one exception, the *κλήϊς* as 'collar-bone' occurs only in the context of a deadly blow to a warrior in that spot (5.146, 579; 17.309; 21.117). The exception occurs in *Iliad* 8. Hector strikes a direct blow with a rock to the *κλήϊς* of Teucer, that is, to the most fatal spot (8.326), but Teucer survives and is carried to safety.³² Hector's distinction as the only warrior ever to strike another in the *κλήϊς* and yet fail to kill him characterizes his problematic relationship to the barrier separating the realm of the living from that of the dead.

And to Hector, more than to any other character, this separation between the two realms is most painfully evident. For, as well as being the character most frequently in conflict with symbolic barriers, Hector is also the most preoccupied with burial.

³¹ For the importance of burial in the Homeric epics, see J. Griffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–7.

³² Teucer, as it happens, is currently enjoying the protection of Aias' shield (8.266–72). This further emphasizes Aias' ability to function as a protective barrier for his comrades. [I am indebted to an anonymous reader at *The Classical Quarterly* for this observation.]

Although concerned to secure it for himself (see *Il.* 7.76–91, 22.256–67 and 338–43), he is also readily prepared to concede it to or withhold it from others—friends or foe. Although the gods consider the right of burial to be a *γέρας θανόντων* ‘right or privilege of the dead’ (*Il.* 16.457), warring mortals do not recognize it as such. Achilles, in his anger, simply refuses (until *Iliad* 24) to accord it to Hector. For Hector, however, the refusal of burial is of frequent strategic importance. He threatens to withhold it from any of his fellow Trojans who hold back from the fighting (15.347), casually leaves fallen companions in the dirt when the occasion demands (8.125–6 and 17.533–5), and cruelly taunts the dying Patroclus that his body will be food for vultures (16.836).

Hector’s refusal to grant burial to Patroclus becomes a preparatory antithesis to Achilles’ later willingness to yield to Priam. Hector attempts to defile the corpse of Patroclus and give it to the dogs of Troy (17.125–7). Opposing Hector, Aias protects the body, carrying his shield here, as at 7.219, like a *πύργος* (17.128). Again reverse imagery is in effect: in this case, Hector is the aggressor, and the barrier, the *πύργος*, will permit burial, while crossing it will prevent it. This foreshadows the reversal in *Iliad* 24 when Hector is the body, the *θύρη* marks the barrier preventing burial, and peaceful crossing of it will permit burial.

In this way, burial itself becomes, like the *ἔρκος*, *πύργος*, *τείχος*, *πύλαι* and *θύραι*, symbolic of the divisions between human beings. Burial divides men from one another in two ways: it permits the dead access to a realm distinct from that of the living, and it becomes an issue over which warring opponents contend. Moreover, the dead themselves provide further foundation for continued dispute. This is expressed directly in the series of retributive single slayings culminating in Achilles’ slaughter of Hector. It is expressed symbolically in *Iliad* 7 when the Achaeans build their *τείχος* with *πύργοι ὑψηλοί* ‘high towers’ and *πύλαι εὖ ἀραρνύιαι* ‘well-joined gates’ directly on top of the *τύμβος* which they have erected over the funeral pyre of their own dead (7.436ff.). The newly dead provide renewed cause for the conflict and contribute—both literally and figuratively—to the barrier dividing the opposing armies. And, once again, the imagery will later be reversed: in *Iliad* 7, a burial precedes the construction of a barrier—wall, tower, gates—against violent assault; in *Iliad* 24, a burial will follow the peaceful penetration of a man-made barrier, a heavily barred door.

If the *σῆμα* as ‘burial mound’ symbolizes divisions both between the living and the dead and between groups of the living, it also symbolizes a *connection* between men of the present and men of the past and future. It is primarily in this sense that Hector seeks to ensure burial for himself. Burial is, for him, a matter of the greatest importance. Before fighting Achilles in *Iliad* 22, he attempts unsuccessfully to get Achilles to agree to swear an oath with him that the victor will return the body of the vanquished to his own people (22.254–72). His dying wish is for a proper burial (22.338–43). In the speech which precedes his confrontation with Aias in *Iliad* 7 (described above), Hector reveals why burial is so important to him. He proposes the following terms for single combat:

ὦδε δὲ μυθέομαι, Ζεὺς δ’ ἄμμ’ ἐπιμάρτυρος ἔστω·
εἰ μὲν κεν ἐμὲ κείνος ἔλῃ ταναήκει χαλκῶι,
τεύχεα συλήσας φερέτω κοίλας ἐπὶ νῆας,
σῶμα δὲ οἴκαδ’ ἐμὸν δόμεναι πάλιν, ὅφρα πυρός με
Τρώες καὶ Τρώων ἄλοχοι λελάχωσι θανόντα.
εἰ δέ κ’ ἐγὼ τὸν ἔλω, δῶήι δέ μοι εὖχος Ἀπόλλων,
τεύχεα συλήσας οἶσω προτὶ Ἴλιον ἱρήν
καὶ κρεμόω προτὶ νηὸν Ἀπόλλωνος ἐκάτοιο,
τὸν δὲ νέκυν ἐπὶ νῆας εὐσέλμους ἀποδώσω,

ὄφρα ἐ ταρχύσωσι κάρη κομόωντες Ἀχαιοὶ
 σῆμά τέ οἱ χεύωσιν ἐπὶ πλατεί Ἑλλησπόντῳ·
 καὶ ποτέ τις εἴπησι καὶ ὀψιγόνων ἀνθρώπων,
 νηὶ πολυκλήϊδι πλέων ἐπὶ οἶνοπα πόντον·
 “ἀνδρὸς μὲν τόδε σῆμα πάλαι κατατεθνηῶτος,
 ὃν ποτ’ ἀριστεύοντα κατέκτανε φαίδιμος Ἔκτωρ.”
 ὥς ποτέ τις ἑρέει· τὸ δ’ ἐμὸν κλέος οὐ ποτ’ ὀλείται.

(7.76–91)

Behold the terms that I make, let Zeus be witness upon them.
 If with the thin edge of the bronze he takes my life, then
 let him strip my armour and carry it back to the hollow ships,
 but give my body to be taken home again, so that the Trojans
 and the wives of the Trojans may give me in death my rite of burning.
 But if I take his life, and Apollo grants me the glory,
 I will strip his armour and carry it to sacred Ilion
 and hang it in front of the temple of far-striking Apollo,
 but his corpse I will give back among the strong-benched vessels
 so that the flowing-haired Achaeans may give him due burial
 and heap up a mound upon him beside the broad passage of Helle.
 And some day one of the men to come will say, as he sees it,
 one who in his benched ship sails on the wine-blue water:
 “This is the mound of a man who died long ago in battle,
 who was one of the bravest, and glorious Hector killed him.”
 So will he speak some day, and my glory will not be forgotten.

In these lines, Hector does not directly acknowledge the possibility of his own death, envisioning glory to himself deriving from the *σῆμα* of his opponent rather than his own.³³ Nevertheless, he does reveal his belief in a connection between the *σῆμα* and everlasting *κλέος*, that is, in the *σῆμα* as the means of transcending the temporal limits of mortal life.

The *θύρη* in 24.317–19, then, in anticipating Achilles’ *θύρη* which Priam must confront, and in recalling the numerous physical barriers which Hector confronts throughout the poem, symbolizes the divisions between warring mortals. But Achilles’ *θύρη* is also the tangible physical obstacle to Hector’s burial. Thus, the *θύρη* in the simile also evokes some of the causes of division between warriors as well as the barrier dividing the realm of the dead from that of the living. Moreover, as the barrier to the creation of Hector’s *σῆμα*, the *θύρη* also represents the barrier to the possibility of transcending the temporal limit of mortal existence.

In turn, the eagle in the omen in *Iliad* 24 represents the possibilities for transcendence of these barriers. As well as recalling the three other eagles of omen in the poem (discussed above) which all presage, directly or indirectly, the success or failure of a barrier crossing, this eagle also may recall two earlier instances in the poem in which Hector is likened to an eagle. Attacking the ships of the Achaeans, Hector is like an eagle swooping down upon other birds:

ἀλλ’ ὥς τ’ ὄρνιθων πετεηνῶν αἰετὸς αἰθῶν
 ἔθνος ἐφορμάται ποταμὸν πάρα βοσκομενάων,

³³ Hector’s attitude in this contrasts sharply with Achilles’ frank acknowledgement of his own imminent death and his lack of concern for a tangible physical memorial. In *Iliad* 18, upon learning that his own death is fated to come soon after Hector’s, Achilles reiterates his determination to kill Hector in revenge for Hector’s slaughter of Patroclus (18.114–21). Nowhere does Achilles evince concern for his own burial or acknowledge the connection between the *σῆμα* and eternal *κλέος*. So unsympathetic to this issue is he that, when he is about to fight Hector, he rejects the latter’s suggestion that they swear an oath that the victor will return the body of the vanquished to his own people (22.254–72). And he refuses Hector’s dying wish that he return his body to his own people for burial (22.338–54).

χηνῶν ἢ γεράνων ἢ κύκνων δουλιχοδείρων,
ὥς Ἔκτωρ ἵθυσσε νεὸς κυανοπρώριοι
ἀντίος αἰΐας·

(15.690–3)

But as a flashing eagle makes his plunge upon other
flying birds as these feed in a swarm by a river,
whether these be geese or cranes or swans long-throated,
so Hector steered the course of his outrush straight for a vessel
with dark prows.

Similarly, in *Iliad* 22, Hector is likened to an eagle intending to seize a lamb or a hare, for

οἴμησεν δὲ ἀλεις ὥς τ' αἰετὸς ὑψιπετῆεις,
ὅς τ' εἰσιν πεδίονδε διὰ νεφέων ἐρεβεννῶν
ἀρπάξων ἢ ἄρν' ἀμαλῆν ἢ πτῶκα λαγῶν·
ὥς Ἔκτωρ οἴμησε τινάσσων φάσγανον ὀξύ.

(22.308–11)

gathering

himself together, he made his swoop, like a high-flown eagle
who launches himself out of the murk of the clouds on the flat land
to catch away a tender lamb or a shivering hare; so
Hector made his sweep, swinging his sharp sword.

In both of these passages, Hector is portrayed as a marauder attacking defenseless creatures. In *Iliad* 22 this is clearly intended ironically, as Achilles is about to kill Hector. The eagle imagery here emphasizes Hector's failure in attempting, contrary to the etymology of his name, to fight offensively rather than defensively. And the effect of both passages is similar to the effect of the imagery showing Hector in confrontation with barriers: it emphasizes the violence that characterizes Hector in particular and barrier crossings in general up until the final book of the poem.

Two of the other three eagles of omen in the poem augur violence in much the same way, and the third accompanies a prediction of violence. The eagle in the omen in *Iliad* 8 has a fawn (yet another defenseless creature) in its talons (8.247–52). The eagle in the omen in *Iliad* 12 holds a snake in its talons, a snake who fights back, it is true, but this omen, as has been discussed above, predicts an *unsuccessful* barrier crossing (12.200–9). The eagle in *Iliad* 13 holds no prey in its talons, but it appears in response to Aias' boast foretelling not any peaceful passage but the Achaeans' utter destruction of Troy (13.821–3).

The eagle in *Iliad* 24 is also inherently—although not at the moment—violent. It appears in response to Priam's prayer for success predicated not on violence but on sympathy and compassion. Priam prays:

Ζεῦ πάτερ, Ἰδηθεν μεδέων, κύδιστε μέγιστε,
δός μ' ἐς Ἀχιλλῆος φίλον ἐλθεῖν ἠδ' ἐλεεινόν,
πέμψον δ' οἰωνόν, ταχὺν ἄγγελον, ὅς τε σοὶ αὐτῶι
φίλτατος οἰωνῶν, καὶ εὐ κράτος ἐστὶ μέγιστον,
δεξιόν, ὅφρα μιν αὐτὸς ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσι νοήσας
τῶι πίσυνος ἐπὶ νῆας ἴω Δαναῶν ταχυπόλων.

(24.308–13)

Father Zeus, watching over us from Ida, most high, most honoured:
grant that I come to Achilles for love and pity; but send me
a bird of omen, a rapid messenger which to your own mind
is dearest of all birds and his strength is biggest, one seen
on the right, so that once my eyes have rested upon him
I may trust in him and go to the ships of the fast-mounted Danaans.

The eagle, when it appears, is called *θηρητήρ* (24.316), but it is not described as engaged in any hunting activity. The simile describing it emphasizes, as we have seen,

its size. It is not presently violent; it is *big*, that is, it is potentially very violent indeed. Priam's peaceful barrier crossing contrasts with Hector's violent ones in that his purposes are vastly different. His success lies in this. But he still has good reason to fear Achilles' barely repressed violence. The 'hunter' eagle is temporarily not engaged in any predatory activity, but the potential for violence remains, emphasizing the fragility and brevity of Priam's peaceful transcendence in the midst of ongoing violence.

Presaging the transient success of Priam's non-violent communication with an enemy, the eagle of omen in *Iliad* 24 figures the occasional ability of language to transcend peacefully the immense barriers dividing warring mortals. But the eagle also recalls Hector's death and presages his immortality, thereby depicting as well the unique ability of language to transcend the temporal limits of mortal existence. A hint of this may be present in the second simile likening Hector to an eagle. The formula αἰετὸς ὑψιπετής 'high-flying eagle' occurs in the *Iliad* only at 22.308 and in the two bird signs denied by Hector in *Iliad* 12 and 13. Thus, arguably, the simile in *Iliad* 22 acts like an omen, presaging Hector's imminent death.³⁴ Perhaps the adjective ὑψιπετής 'high-flying' is implied, too, in the omen in *Iliad* 24, for the eagle is called τελειότατος πετεηνῶν 'most perfect of flying creatures' (i.e. 'bringing the surest of omens') and described as having πτερὰ on both sides as great as the door of a ὑπόροφος θάλαμος 'high-roofed chamber'. If so, this eagle recalls Hector's death as the eagle in *Iliad* 22 presages it.

If the eagle at 22.308–11 presages Hector's death, it also intimates his immortality. The simile at *Iliad* 22.308–11 follows immediately upon Hector's recognition of his own imminent death. He states:

νῦν αὐτὲ με μοῖρα κιχάνει.
μὴ μὰν ἀσπονδί γε καὶ ἀκλειῶς ἀπολοίμην,
ἀλλὰ μέγα ῥέξας τι καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι.

(22.303–5)

But now my death is upon me.
Let me at least not die without a struggle, inglorious,
but do some big thing first, that men to come shall know of it.

Acknowledging death, Hector reiterates his desire for immortal κλέος.

The omen in *Iliad* 24, however, makes the form of this immortality more explicit, for the eagle does not presage Hector's immortality simply by presaging his burial. Homer is clear that the σῆμα 'burial mound' itself is unreliable as a perpetual memorial. During the funeral games for Patroclus in *Iliad* 23, Nestor points out to his son Antilochus the turning post for the chariot race:

σῆμα δέ τοι ἔρέω μάλ' ἀριφραδές, οὐδέ σε λήσει.
ἔστηκε ξύλον αὖον ὅσον τ' ὄργυι' ὑπὲρ αἴης,
ἢ δρυὸς ἢ πεύκης· τὸ μὲν οὐ καταπύθεται ὄμβρῳι,
λᾶε δὲ τοῦ ἐκάτερθεν ἐρηρέδαται δύο λευκῶ
ἐν ξυνοχῆμισιν ὁδοῦ, λείος δ' ἱππόδρομος ἀμφίς·
ἦ τευ σῆμα βροτοῖο πάλαι κατατεθνηγῶτος,

³⁴ R. W. Bushnell argues that 'in the intersection of these passages, Hector himself becomes a bird sign, the omen of his own death' (*Helios* 9 [1982], 8). The simile in *Iliad* 22 also occurs at *Odyssey* 24.538 to describe Odysseus' final confrontation with the suitors (Bushnell, *Helios* 9 [1982], 13, n. 19). In the *Iliad*, only Menelaus and Achilles are also compared to an αἰετός: the former for his vision (17.674), the latter for his speed (21.252) (Bushnell, *Helios* 9 [1982], 13, n. 18).

ἦ τό γε νύσσα τέτυκτο ἐπὶ προτέρων ἀνθρώπων,
καὶ νῦν τέρματ' ἔθηκε ποδάρκης δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.

(23.326–33)

I will give you a clear mark [σήμα] and you cannot fail to notice it.
There is a dry stump standing up from the ground about six feet,
oak, it may be, or pine, and not rotted away by rain-water,
and two white stones are leaned against it, one on either side,
at the joining place of the ways, and there is smooth driving around it.
Either it is the grave-mark [σήμα] of someone who died long ago,
or was set as a racing goal by men who lived before our time.
Now swift-footed brilliant Achilles has made it the turning-post.

The σήμα 'burial mound' is thus not inevitably recognizable as such for all time. It cannot effectively enable mortal κλέος to transcend the limits of time.

But the word σήμα (which has, too, the more general meaning of 'sign') refers also to a physical manifestation of the glory conferred by epic poetry.³⁵ The requisite ability for interpretation is νόησις 'intelligence, understanding'.³⁶ Following Hecuba's advice, Priam prays to Zeus for a bird of omen so that νοήσας 'having perceived' it, Priam may trust in it and proceed to Achilles' camp (24.294–5 and 312–13). Thus, the omen is, in this sense, a σήμα 'sign', both for Priam, and for the audience.

By preserving the story of Hector's life, death, and burial, the epic itself becomes his memorial. The eagle of omen in *Iliad* 24, participating in the traditional association between words and the flight of birds,³⁷ presages the story's survival in song.³⁸ The eagle and the door in the simile thus depict the unique ability of epic poetry to transcend the temporal limits of mortal existence.

In sum, *Iliad* 24.314–21 is remarkable because, in employing a simile to describe a bird of omen, the passage explicitly places the audience of the poem in the role of the μάντις who must attempt to divine the purposes of the comparison in order to interpret the omen. The eagle is Zeus' bird, the marker of Zeus' favor. When it appears to the characters in the *Iliad*, it is interpreted as a divine sign presaging the success or failure of the immediate or subsequent crossing of a barrier. By drawing an analogy between Zeus' eagle and a well-barred door of a rich man, that is, by emphasizing the *consonance* of size, the poet is explicitly asking the audience to look for the *dissonances*, to recognize the inherent opposition between that which the eagle

³⁵ For a discussion with further bibliography, see G. Nagy, *Arethusa* 16 (1983), 35–55. Nagy argues that 'the σήμα is not just the "sign" of death, it is also the potential "sign" of life after death,' and that, in a sense, 'the entire *Iliad* is a σήμα reinforcing the will of Zeus' (50). See also Nagy, *op. cit.*, pp. 174–210. M. Lynn-George maintains that the epic itself, in conferring κλέος, 'tells the story of the σήμα, a tale of the tomb-monument, affirming death and survival at the same time. Within the *Iliad*, the contemplation of the sign of survival is also combined with a consideration of the possibility of the survival of the sign. The *Iliad* constructs a sign of survival and annihilation, the σήμα, in the awareness of the possibility of the annihilation of all surviving signs' (Lynn-George, *op. cit.*, p. 257). Furthermore, the significance of the σήμα 'includes the sense in which it functions within the text as a sign for the text, both conceived as monuments conferring κλέος' (Lynn-George, *op. cit.*, p. 266).

³⁶ G. Nagy contends that 'the testimony of Greek poetry about σήμα and νόησις turns out to be a lesson in how to read this poetry: the Greek poem is a σήμα that requires the νόησις of those who hear it' (*Arethusa* 16 [1983], 51).

³⁷ For the ancient association between words and the flight of winged creatures, see R. B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 67, n. 4, and pp. 469–70.

³⁸ M. Mueller views the final book of the poem as 'an aesthetic resolution,' pointing out that the fighting will continue and 'Troy will fall. The *Iliad* remains' (Mueller, *The Iliad* [London, 1984], p. 75). The particular aptness of bird imagery to depict poetry is keenly recognized by

symbolizes and that which the door symbolizes. Anticipating Achilles' barred door, the obstacle to Hector's burial, and recalling the towers, walls, and gates Hector confronts throughout the poem, the door participates in a pattern of imagery which represents as physical barriers not only the conflicts dividing individuals and armies but also the limits inherent in the condition of being mortal. In turn, the eagle augurs the possibilities for transcendence in the form of violence or in the form of peaceful communication—fragile though the moments of the latter may be (*Il.* 24.560 and 568–70, for example)—and in the ability of epic poetry to memorialize mortal exploits in song. The simile both prefigures the culminating events of the poem and provides a visual depiction of human existence as defined by barriers (both man-made and existential) and the possibilities for transcendence. The omen itself can be understood as the explicit *σημα* 'sign' of mortals' only hope for community and nearest grasp at immortality.

Guilford, CT

EMILY KATZ ANHALT

Pindar who sees in the ability of birds to fly an excellent image for the ability of song to travel on into the future (D. Steiner, *The Crown of Song: Metaphor in Pindar* [London and New York, 1986], pp. 105–9).