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Homer's Trojan Theater*

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AN UGLY SECRET, SOMETIMES BETRAYED BY THE SUDDEN JERK OF THE HEAD of the dozing reader, admits in muffled tones that a substantial proportion of what is recognized as great literature is boring. The definitive work on the tedium of great art has yet to be written, but it would doubtless include lengthy chapters on *The Fairy Queen*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Wilhelm Meister*, *I Promessi Sposi*, Balzac's 50 page description of a card game played in only one area of Normandy—I'll leave my readers to supply their own candidates for full treatment. Wretch that I am, I have to admit that I never got past page 37 of Broch's *Death of Virgil*. Now, among Greek texts frequently appearing as finalists for The Most Boring Award are undoubtedly the Catalogue of Ships and the so-called Battle Books of the *Iliad*.

My title is Homer's Theater of Troy with a play on three meanings of the word "theater"; first, a theater of war offering a synoptic vision of a military

* This paper retains the oral character of the presentation at the San Diego meeting of the APA. A fuller version, covering Books 12-17, will appear as a monograph. Readers are invited to view the website (http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/iliad/interface/Iliad_ch12_eng.swf; text in Greek: http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/iliad/interface/Iliad_ch12_grk.swf) that presents a digital model of the action of Book 12. I would like to thank Worthy Martin, Chad Keller, and above all, Doug Ross of the University of Virginia's Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, as well as the Director, Bernie Frisher, for their hard work and patience in translating Homer's verbal theater into a visual prototype. Since the website is still very much a work in progress, any comments and suggestions from readers would be most appreciated. I am also grateful to my friends and colleagues, Paul Barolsky, Ted Lendon, and Roger Stein who commented on various versions of this text. Despite their best intentions, the flaws that remain can only be blamed on me. All translations are my own.

campaign; then, theater as a place for spectators to observe a dramatic performance. Derived from the extraordinarily rich Greek terminology involving sight, *theesthai* signifies a particular kind of seeing, one in which the act of perceiving elicits wonder in the beholder. Finally, somewhat anachronistically, I am alluding to what was known in the Renaissance as the “theater of memory,” a gloriously complex version of the classical mnemonic system of *loci*.¹

Descriptions of battle take up fully one third of the *Iliad*. Of the poem’s 360 named characters, 232 are warriors killed or wounded (cf. Mueller 1984: 82).² Outside of the rare but notorious instances of Homer’s nodding when a character, once killed, appears later to fight again,³ the poet is remarkable in his ability to keep his characters on the battlefield straight. At each moment, he seems to know the location of his characters; and if his attention shifts elsewhere for a while and then returns, he finds them again where they belong, whether in the same place or where they were headed. My question here is: how does he do it? Over the course of thousands of verses, we find astonishingly little confusion. His remarkable control over the activities of his characters becomes most evident when the narrative splits the battles into several arenas.

Anyone who has read the *Iliad* will remember, perhaps not so fondly, the Battle Books, particularly Books 12–15. The narrative is only occasionally relieved by short “obituaries,” similes, and the shenanigans of the gods (*inter alia* the high comedy of Hera’s seduction of Zeus). But after the major Greek heroes (with the exception of Ajax) have been put out of commission, for the most part we are assaulted with a welter of names, some appearing only as “cannon fodder,” and relentless descriptions of wounding and slaughter, many quite grisly and grotesque. Indeed, the whole sequence constitutes a monumental example of Homeric retardation; nothing decisive occurs. The wall of the Achaeans, breached at the end of Book 12, must be taken again, and the burning of the Greek ships, long threatened and delayed, finally happens only at the end of Book 15. But van Wees tries to reassure us: “For all their length, the battle scenes will seem far from boring once we can visualize the action” (van Wees 1997: 668). Other critics, however, insist that “the reader is given only sparse and poorly visualized spatial information” (Anderrson 1976: 17 and 23); concerning the action on the plain of Troy: “There is no

¹ See Yates 1966: esp. 129–59. On the ancient tradition, see Blum 1969.

² Armstrong 1969: 30 gives 238 named casualties and 26 unnamed, 61 of which are Greek and 208, Trojan.

³ Armstrong 1969 counts eight nods.

general design on which we may rely in following the progress of the narrative" (Leaf 1900–1902: 1, 525). Yet a more careful examination reveals that the seemingly chaotic arrangement of the fighting is in fact highly structured and coherent.

While studies of ring-composition or analyses of the typical building blocks of Homeric battle sequences have all contributed to the understanding of the patterns of epic combat, they have been largely unconcerned with the spatial and temporal organization of the fighting and its overall progress. The poet's description, as I will try to show, is presented in such a way that the apparently random encounters on the battlefield allow the audience to be aware of the course of the war at each moment. In addition to showing which side is winning (cf. Willcock 1993: 142–46), Homer also seems to know at any given instant where each of the important heroes—and even second tier figures—is deployed on the battlefield.

Let me also make clear right from the start that in what follows I am not concerned with "real" geography or mapping the *Iliad's* battles onto the plain below Hisarlik. Rather, it is the text of Homer and the spaces created in the text and the mapping of the action within that narrative space that will occupy me. In the case of the Achaean wall that dominates the fighting in Book 12, Homer as good as tells us not to waste our time looking for its traces. I am also not concerned here with Greek military history nor with the old controversies concerning hoplite fighting or the use of war chariots.⁴ I will, however, assume that the battle scenes made sense to the poet's audience who were well versed in the conventions and verbal cues of battlefield descriptions that formed a typical component of epic narrative. But we should also constantly bear in mind that the story was conveyed by an expert performer and storyteller in front of an audience whose attention and receptiveness he courted. And we should never forget that live performance can facilitate the transmission of complex narrative movements, not only through verbal devices such as deixis, but also by exploiting gesture and vocal intonation.

My larger investigation examines the organization of the battles, especially in books 12 and 13 when the battlefield is split into two (and occasionally three) theaters of operation; Book 15, by contrast, views the battlefield not over its front, but rather in depth, as the Greeks are steadily pushed back and compressed into an ever shrinking area beside their ships. Both Books 16 and 17 have a single focus defined by Patroklos: the 16th book follows his trajectory from Achilles' camp to the walls of Troy, his retreat, and finally his death, while in Book 17 the motionless corpse of Patroklos becomes the

⁴ A recent survey of the field: Lendon 2005 and his useful bibliographical note.

focal point around which the action loops. In all these sequences, I contend, the action is conceived in spatial terms. Various devices, particularly deictic markers, indicate the deployment of forces and the layout of the battlefield in a coherent manner. Second, I argue for the importance of visualization for both the poet and his audience, and I exploit recent cognitive studies involving narrative and visualization in story telling. Finally I will suggest that the poet of the *Iliad* made use of mnemonic techniques that allowed him to master the complexity of the action on the field of battle, to visualize the location of his major characters, and thus to convey to his listeners a clear and vivid picture of the Trojan theater.

Obviously, I cannot present here more than a small portion of this study, and here I will focus on Book 12. But before doing so, let me review a few relevant aspects of Homeric poetics.

Since the work of Milman Parry, the study of the Homeric poems has focused on verbal repetitions of formulaic expressions on the level of the individual hexameter lines, on type scenes, and finally on typical motifs and themes that form the larger building blocks of the narrative. A new interest in the performance and reception of archaic Greek poetry has, however, shifted the center of gravity in recent discussions of Homeric epic. This new focus has prompted scholars to look at the interaction between poet and audience, at how the poet conveys his story, and how the audience receives it.

As our guide, the epic poet mediates our access to the heroic world through an elaborate enunciative interchange that links his audience to the events he narrates. The poet brings the past and the distant of the epic story into the present and the near, as if it were unfolding before our very eyes. The vehicle that makes possible this shift from our everyday present to an imagined epic past is a particular faculty of the Muses, their vision, as the famous invocation before the Catalogue of ships emphasizes:

ὕμεῖς γὰρ θεαί ἐστε, πάρεστέ τε, ἴστέ τε πάντα,
 ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν...

You are goddesses, are present, and have seen all;
 But we hear only hearsay and know nothing ... (2. 485–86)

The Muses' knowledge depends on their omnipresence and their eye witnessing of all events. For the Greeks, appropriately called *Augenmenschen* ("eye-people"), to know is to have seen. In our poet's invocation, he asks the Muses to provide him with their special kind of knowledge, visual in its immediacy, normally inaccessible to human beings, but of which the Muses are the repository. The *aoidos*, or "bard" in turn, transmits and makes present to his audience his vision of events by various enunciative means. For instance,

the extraordinarily high percentage of direct speech in Homer shifts the deictic center from the *hic et nunc* of the performance to the *hic et nunc* of his characters: the Greek camp at Troy in the tenth year of the War. Another powerful and startling effect is produced when the poet addresses one of his characters within the story: the famous Homeric apostrophe.

Elsewhere, the bard exploits his power to transform his auditors into spectators and even participants in the story by occasionally bringing on (in the potential optative either in the 2nd or 3rd person) a would-be eye-witness to the action; for example:

οὐδ' ἂν ἔτι φράδμων περ ἄνῃρ Σαρπηδόνα δῖον
ἔγνω, ἐπεὶ βελέεσσι καὶ αἵματι καὶ κονίησιν
ἐκ κεφαλῆς εἴλυτο διαμπερὲς ἐς πόδας ἄκρους.

Nor would even **an observant man** still have **recognized**
Shining Sarpedon, since with spears and blood and dust
He was shrouded from his head to the tips of his toes. (16. 638–40)

Another remarkable passage comes at the end of Book 4 (4.539–44):

ἐνθά κεν οὐκέτι ἔργον ἄνῃρ ὀνόσαιτο μετελθών,
ὅς τις ἔτ' ἄβλητος καὶ ἀνούτατος ὀξείῃ χαλκῷ
δινεύοι κατὰ μέσσον, ἄγοι δέ ἐ Πάλλας Ἀθήνη
χειρὸς ἐλοῦσ', αὐτὰρ βελέων ἀπερύκοι ἐρωήν·
πολλοὶ γὰρ Τρώων καὶ Ἀχαιῶν ἦματι κείνῳ
πρηνέες ἐν κονίησι παρ' ἀλλήλοισι τέταντο.

Then a man who came upon the battle, would have found no fault in it,
One who had not yet been hit or wounded with the sharp bronze,
Whirling in the midst of it, and Pallas Athena would lead him,
Taking him by the hand, but keeping off the rush of the missiles;
For many of the Trojans and Achaians on that day
Were stretched out headlong in the dust beside each other.

In his discussion of *enargeia*, Dionysius of Halicarnassus offers a striking parallel:

ἦδεται γὰρ ἡ διάνοια παντὸς ἀνθρώπου χειραγωγούμενη διὰ
τῶν λόγων ἐπὶ τὰ ἔργα καὶ μὴ μόνον ἀκούουσα τῶν λεγομένων,
ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ πραττόμενα ὁρῶσα.

For the understanding of every human being takes pleasure in being **led by the hand through words to deeds and not only hearing what was said, but also seeing what was done**. (*Ant. Rom.* 11.1.3; cited in Walker 1993: 364)

In the *Iliad*, the Homeric bard takes us by the hand and his imaginative guidance conducts us safely through the fiery heart of battle, allowing his listeners to share in the re-presentation of the vision of the heroic world the Muses have entrusted to him.

Throughout the preceding discussion I have put special emphasis on the visual and spatial features of the interaction that unites the Muse, the poet, and the recipients of his performance. Cognitive studies have demonstrated the importance of visual imagery in remembering and, more particularly, the role of visual memory in oral traditions of storytelling.⁵ Traditional storytellers frequently speak of seeing the story unfold before their eyes “like a silent movie, a set of slides, or even a dramatic play...” (Labrie 1981: 91).

Recent research has shown that imagery, that is, a mental visual representation (“seeing in the mind’s eye”) is a system analogous to perception and “uses the same parts of the brain as visual perception” (Rubin 1995: 57). In addition, there appears to be a neural distinction between object perception that describes and identifies objects and spatial perception that situates objects in space. While verbal recall and visual memory involve different systems and are centered in different parts of the brain, visual imagery, especially the spatial variety, can be a powerful aid to memory. Thus, if I am given the task of memorizing a list of 20 household items, my performance will be substantially better if I imagine them in a specific location, say, in my apartment. I will return to those mnemonic techniques that have exploited this correlation. For now, it is important to stress that, as Rubin concludes, “oral traditions appear to be remarkably spatial” (Rubin 1995: 59). “In an oral tradition, imagery involves the transformation of a sequential verbal input into a spatial image and back to a sequential verbal output” (Rubin 1995: 62). This phenomenon is encapsulated in the old term, *enargeia*, that characteristic vividness so much admired by the ancient critics of the Homeric epics, a vividness that transforms auditors into spectators.

In the past, Homeric studies have tended to marginalize the relevance of visual memory and imagery. Yet studies of non-metrical prose storytellers have shown the crucial role it plays; and we are beginning to see the application of cognitive studies to Homer and a growing recognition of the importance of visual and spatial imagery.⁶ Indeed, some scholars have also emphasized the cinematic character of Homeric battle narrative and speak of panoramic or wide-angle shots and zooming in for close-ups. While drawing attention

⁵ Much of this paragraph is based on the discussion of imagery in Rubin 1995 which I have summarized and simplified.

⁶ See especially Minchin 2001.

to the visual character of Homeric combat, they nevertheless frequently neglect its complex movements and topographies and the verbal signposts that define them.

I begin with Book 12 and the *Teichomachia*, the battle that depicts the assault on the Achaean Wall that the Greeks had built in Book 7 but which only now takes center stage. Homer opens the *Teichomachia*, bizarrely enough, not by describing the wall to which all eyes will be drawn over the next several books, but by recounting its destruction at a future time when the Trojan War will have become a distant memory.⁷ We conclude: what the poet builds, he can destroy; ὁ δὲ πλάστας ποιητῆς ἠφάνισεν (Aristotle cited in Strabo 13. 1.36; p. 598).⁸ His wall of words exists only in his poetry and can be taken as an emblem for his whole undertaking. After his proleptic description of the future obliteration of the Greek wall, the poet tells us:

τότε δ' ἄμφι μάχη ἐνοπή τε δεδήει
τεῖχος ἐύδητον, κανάχιζε δὲ δούρατα πύργων
βαλλόμεν'.

But at that time battle and tumult were blazing round about
The well-built wall, and the beams of the towers reverberated
As they were struck. (12. 35–37)

In the next few books, the Greek fortifications will exercise a critical narrative function (see *fig. 1*).⁹ For they render visible the defensive posture of the Greeks vis à vis the Trojans. The wall will serve as a line demarcating the position of both armies as they struggle now, not on the Trojan plain between the city and the Achaian camp, but within the Greek encampment itself, immediately in front of their ships (see *fig. 2*).¹⁰

In Book 11, we had left Hector about to make his way from the extreme edge (ἐσχατιῇ 11. 524) of the battlefield by the banks of the Scamander—which turns out to have been on the left (μάχης ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ μάρνατο πάσης 11. 498).

The phrase μάχης ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ occurs four other times in the *Iliad* (5. 355, 13. 765, 17. 116 and 682; a variant νηῶν ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ at 12. 118, 13. 675, cf. 13. 326). “Right” and “left” are deictic markers whose meaning is dependent on the speaker's orientation. What is essential to realize is that the orienta-

⁷ Already in Book 7. 459–63, the poet has alluded to the wall's future destruction even as it is being built.

⁸ See also Strabo 2.3.6 and the bT scholium at 12.3.

⁹ This is the rendering of W. Andrae in Schuhardt 1928.

¹⁰ Mannsperger 2001: 81. I differ from some details of her plan.

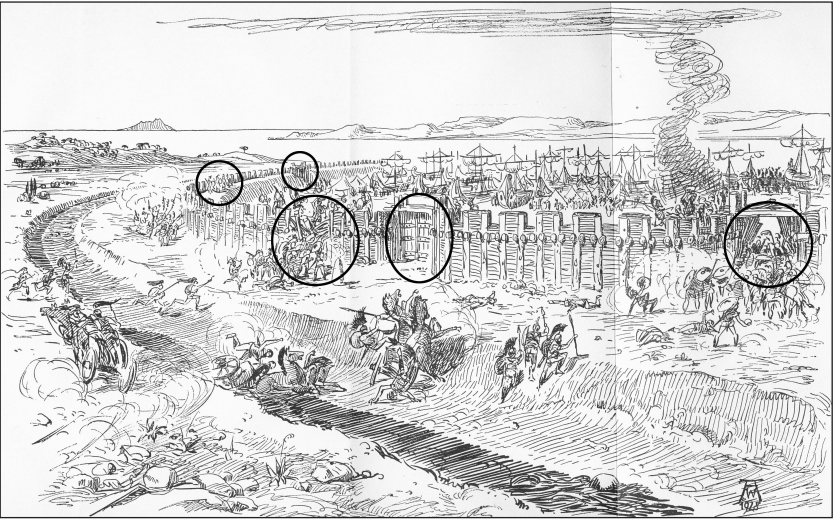


Figure 1.

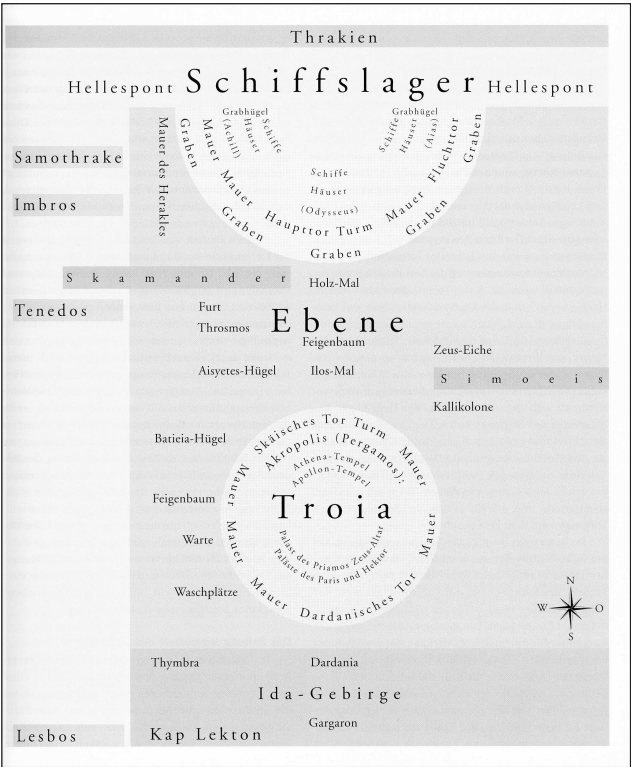


Figure 2.

tion of right and left in the *Iliad* are constant and seen from the perspective of a narrator situated in the center of the Greek camp facing the Trojan plain (cf. Ribbeck 1880; Janko 1992 on 13. 675).¹¹ Thus the narrator can speak of Hector's being μάχης ἐπ' ἀριστερά, but Hector's comrade Kebriones speaks of the Trojan's position as ἐσχατιῇ πολέμοιο.¹² In fact, the poet has given us the coordinates of his position most clearly, and I think not accidentally, at the beginning of Book 11, the opening of the great day of battle, when Zeus unleashes Eris:

στῆ δ' ἐπ' Ὀδυσσῆος μεγακήτεϊ νηὶ μελαίνῃ,
 ἥ ῥ' ἐν μεσσάτῳ ἔσκε γεγωνέμεν ἀμφοτέρωσιν,
 ἡμὲν ἐπ' Αἴαντος κλισίας Τελαμωνιάδαο
 ἡδ' ἐπ' Ἀχιλλῆος, τοί ῥ' ἔσχατα νῆας εἵσας
 εἵρυσαν, ἠνορέη πίσυνοι καὶ κάρτεϊ χειρῶν.

She stood upon the enormous black ship of Odysseus,
 Which occupied the middle space, so as to shout to both sides,
 Both toward the camp of Telemonian Ajax
 And to that of Achilles who had drawn up their balanced ships
 at the farthest ends,

Confident of their courage and the strength of their hands. (11.5–9)

In other words, Homer positions himself centrally—and hence also his audience—in line with the encampment of Odysseus, where as we also learn, the Greeks “had their customary place of assembly and where they had established altars for the gods” (11.806–8). The camps of Ajax and Achilles occupy the extreme left and right flanks respectively. Other passages scattered throughout the poem provide further details of the disposition of the Greek contingents as well as various landmarks on the Trojan plain.

At Kebriones' urging, then, Hector makes his way from the extreme left flank (always from the Greek point of view) (11. 521–30) to the center where he will remain for the next few books. Before assaulting the wall, Hector, now having arrived at the center, divides his forces into 5 columns (12. 87–107),¹³ each with three leaders who include the most prominent of the Trojan warriors:

¹¹ Cuillandre 1944 offers the most detailed and precise account of the general layout of the battlefield, but many of his assumptions can be shown to be wrong. The plan of Mannsperger (fig. 2) must be inverted to give the correct orientation. See also below on orientation. Andrae's reconstruction (fig. 1) depicts the wall from the outside, i.e., the Trojan perspective.

¹² Cf. *Il.* 20. 328 where Poseidon rescues Aeneas and sets him down ἐπ' ἐσχατιῇ [...] πολέμοιο.

¹³ Homer presents other five-fold divisions: Trojans, 11. 56–65; Myrmidons, 16. 171–97; Pylians, 4. 293–96.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5. ¹⁴
Hector	Paris	Helenos	Aeneas	Sarpedon
Poulydamas	Alkathoos	Deiphobos	Archelochos	Glaukos
Kebriones	Agenor	Asios	Akamas	Asteropaios

Commentators generally dismiss these elaborate preparations. We might reasonably expect that the five contingents would attack the wall and that the wall itself might have five gates.¹⁵ The five-fold division of the Trojan forces and their allies, however, while indeed a significant feature of the *Teichomachia* and even beyond to the battle by the Greek ships, does not function as expected. Homer's plan turns out to be more complex and more far-reaching; it encompasses the whole third day of battle (Books 11–18) that constitutes the most intricate and multi-faceted description of warfare in the *Iliad*. As will emerge subsequently, at this point Hector and his forces will continue to occupy the center, the three contingents led by Paris, Helenos, and Aeneas will take their positions on the left (speaking always from the narrator's—which is also the Greeks' point of view) where they will be the leading warriors in the battle that takes up most of Book 13, while Sarpedon and the allies will hold the right (website position 1).¹⁶ We must keep this configuration in mind to grasp the progress of the subsequent battle.¹⁷

Book 12 recounts three separate assaults on the wall; the first involves Asios who, displeased with the plan to attack the wall on foot, insists on driving his horses to the left (12. 118). There, the Achaeans are rushing in from the plain through a gate in the fortifications guarded by two Lapiths (website, position 2). Asios's attempt to take the wall by driving through an open gate will end in failure. The two other assaults involve different strategies and meet with success: first, Sarpedon will try to scale the wall, and then Hector will manage

¹⁴ On the web model, Hector's contingent is green, Paris's purple, Helenos yellow, Aeneas red, and Sarpedon blue; Greeks have figure-eight shields, while the Trojans carry round ones.

¹⁵ As Andrae in Schuchhardt 1928 assumed. I have circled the gates on fig. 1.

¹⁶ We must remember that the station of the Lycian contingent could easily have been indicated by a gesture on the part of the bard.

¹⁷ The question of the number of gates in the Achaean wall is an old one. Aristarchus insisted there was only one gate and manipulated the text to make it seem so. See Scholia at 7. 339, 12.175–81, and 12. 340 (Erbse); cf. Hainsworth 1993: 313–14 and his comments on 12. 340; and van der Valk 1963: 1, 575–80. Albracht 1895: 10 makes the reasonable suggestion that the *purgoi* are meant to protect the gates. On that assumption, the Achaean wall might be imagined to have at least three gates, one on the left (Asios), one on the right (cf. Sarpedon, who attacks Menestheus's tower, 12.), and one in the center (Hector).

to break through the main Achaean gate. Now, in one of those rare references to himself, the poet interrupts his narrative:

Ἄλλοι δ' ἄμφ' ἄλλησι μάχην ἐμάχοντο πύλῃσιν·
ἀργαλέον δέ με ταῦτα θεὸν ὥς πάντ' ἀγορεύσαι·
πάντη γὰρ περὶ τείχος ὀρώρει θεσπιδαὲς πῦρ
λαΐνον.

Others were fighting around other gates; (website, position 3)

It is difficult for me to recount all these things, as if I were a god;

For in every direction around the stone wall an ineffable fire arose.

(12. 175–78)

Interrupting the first episode of the *Teichomachia*, the poet suddenly comments on the difficulty of narrating the story he is in fact recounting. This jarring and self-referential interruption momentarily yanks us off the battlefield and reminds us both of the immediate context of the performance and draws attention to the complexity of the narrative action encompassing several fronts that will occupy the next two books. For, in a display of virtuosity, the poet's narration will indeed embrace the multiple engagements taking place concurrently throughout the field of battle, θεὸν ὥς. Thus in addition to drawing attention to its own poetics, this passage exploits some of the verbal and poetic techniques that facilitate the presentation of what the Scholia call the πολυμερὲς μάχη or the multifaceted battle.

Ἄλλοι δ' ἄμφ' ἄλλησι μάχην ἐμάχοντο πύλῃσιν: what we are accustomed to calling the imperfect tense (ἐμάχοντο) is used here to describe the generalized fighting in the background, before the poet turns—or as here, returns—to the main narrative in the aorist (ἔβαλον, 178). But the distinction between these verbal forms is not temporal but aspectual: imperfective or durative action viewed as an ongoing process as opposed to the aorist, which views the action as an event *tout court*. And we should remember that in Greek, the imperfect is the marked form in opposition to the unmarked aorist (Friedrich 1974: 1–44). The distinction is not confined to the verb forms: in the aorist we usually find individually named warriors and their victims as opposed to the anonymous “they” or “Greeks” and “Trojans” of the generalized descriptions in the imperfect. However, as we shall see, in those passages that indicate a *spatial* shift to a different area of the battlefield, we find the imperfect, or more properly, the imperfective. This form indicates that an action is conceived as continuing in the background while the poet focuses his attention on another part of the battlefield. The alternation of verbal forms thus makes possible the narration of multiple actions.

At line 178, we return to the battlefield: while the Lapiths (ὄφρα) are occupied in the imperfect with fallen Trojans, meanwhile (τόφρα) we return to the center where the best troops were following (imperfect) Hector and Poulydamas (12. 196–9; website, position 4). An omen appears (aorists), and Poulydamas warns of disaster, but Hector rejects his advice. Generalized battle ensues (imperfects) with Trojans attacking the wall and the Greeks defending it. Meanwhile, the two Ajaxes, going in all different directions, kept (again imperfects) encouraging the Greeks (website, position 5). The first of many similes that punctuate the narrative, likening the battle to a snowstorm, serves as a transition to a resumption of the narrative, often, as here, at a different position on the battlefield.

It is worth considering why similes are so frequently used to facilitate the transition from one theater of action to another. Unlike the similes that characterize the actions of individual warriors, these transitional similes tend to view the action on the battlefield panoramically, zooming out, so to speak, from the fray and generally represent phenomena both natural and domestic presumably more familiar to the audience. By bringing us from a specific “there” to the “here” of the performative context, such similes draw attention to the fictive character of the narrative and can serve to transport us to a new theater of action.

As it turns out, when we join the fighting on the right with Sarpedon and his Lycians, the shift is introduced by a rather odd contrafactual:

οὐδ' ἄν πω τότε γε Τρῶες καὶ φαίδιμος Ἴκτωρ
τείχεος ἐρρήξαντο πύλας καὶ μακρὸν ὄχηα,
εἰ μὴ ἄρ' υἱὸν ἐὼν Σαρπηδόνα μητίετα Ζεὺς
ᾤρσεν ἐπ' Ἀργείοισι...

In fact, the Trojans and glorious Hector would never have
Broken through the gates of the wall and the long bolt,
If Zeus of devisings had not roused his own son Sarpedon
Against the Argives... (12. 290–93; website, position 6)

In the event, it is of course Hector who at the climactic end of the book, thrusts an enormous boulder against the central gate, but how Sarpedon's actions on the right form a necessary prelude to that Trojan breakthrough is not immediately clear. However, an analysis of the positions of the various actors around the Achaean wall reveals the somewhat surprising connection between the two actions. Sarpedon begins his assault upon the wall (aorists) and then delivers his famous speech to his companion Glaukos. From his tower, the Athenian Menestheus observes the two Lycians approaching and seeks help from the two Ajaxes and Teucer stationed at the center opposite

Hector, but the din of battle precludes his shouting for help.¹⁸ The Athenian commands a messenger to summon Ajax (12. 343–63). Both Menestheus's speech and the herald's transmission are rich in deictics: steep destruction is imminent *here* (τῇδε); but if there is toil *there* too (καὶ κεῖθι), let Telemonian Ajax alone *come* and Teucer *follow* him. When these two arrive (aorists) at Menestheus's tower, the Lycians are engaged in mounting (imperfects) the breastworks (website, position 7). In the ensuing battle (aorists and named warriors), Sarpedon manages to tear down part of the breastworks, but at first the encounter ends in a stalemate described in a vivid simile of two men fighting over a boundary stone. The general description of fighting is then extended to all parts of the wall:

πάντῃ δὴ πύργοι καὶ ἐπάλξεις αἵματι φωτῶν
ἑρράδατ' ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἀπὸ Τρώων καὶ Ἀχαιῶν.

In every direction, the towers and breastworks were flowing
With the blood of men on both sides, the Trojans and the Achaeans
(12. 430–31; website, position 8)

Again a simile, this time of the honest woman carefully weighing out her wool, describes the equal battle (ἴσα μάχη) and forms the transition back to the center and to Hector's decisive breakthrough that ends the book (website, position 9).

We can now see how Sarpedon's attack on the right contributed to Hector's successful breaching of the gate. For the Lycian's action precipitated Ajax's departure from the center, where he would have stood in the way of Hector's moment of triumph. The taking of the wall is then summarized at the end of the book:

αὐτίκα δ' οἱ μὲν τεῖχος ὑπέρβασαν,¹⁹ οἱ δὲ κατ' αὐτὰς
ποιητὰς ἐσέχυντο πύλας· Δαναοὶ δὲ φόβηθεν
νήας ἀνὰ γλαφυράς, ὅμαδος δ' ἀλίσστος ἐτύχθη.

¹⁸ Ajax and Teucer may be nearby (ἐγγύθεν, 12. 337), but the elaborate descriptions of both sending for aid and the arrival of Ajax and Teucer to block the assault of the Lycians suggest some distance.

¹⁹ Probably relying on Aristarchus, Aristonicus at 12. 468 recognized that the subject here is the Lycians. Cf. the bT Scholia at 12. 461–70, who after praising the ἐνέργεια of the passage, note that it arises also ἐκ τῶν ὑπερβαινόντων τὸ τεῖχος, καθ' ὃ μέρος ἔρρηξε Σαρπηδῶν, ἐκ τῶν εἰστρεχόντων εἰς τὰς πύλας, καθ' ὃ μέρος ἔρρηξε αὐτὰς ὁ Ἑκτώρ.

Straightway, some went **over** the wall [the Lycians],
 But others [Hector and the Trojans] poured in **through** the wrought gates;
 and the Danaans fled
 Among the hollow ships, and a ceaseless racket arose.
 (12. 469–71; website, position 10)

Let me now summarize our findings thus far concerning Homer's procedures in describing the battlefield. First, he has divided the action into three theaters of war, left, right, and center, which are invariable and visualized from the perspective of the Greek camp looking toward Troy. Second, he uses aorists to describe foregrounded actions involving named participants, while imperfects are used to describe generalized actions that often form transitions between different zones of combat. These imperfects in their durative and continuative aspect reveal that these activities are thought to carry on in the background. Finally, such transitions frequently culminate in similes, usually to characterize the preceding general activities, before the poet turns back to the narration of specific events taking place in a different area of the battlefield.

SPATIAL FORM AND PATHS

My analysis has emphasized the visual component that organizes the action both in the poet's presentation and in the audience's comprehension of events played out on the battlefield. I have also drawn attention to the verbal cues that show how the poet of the *Iliad* "saw" in his mind's eye and made visible to his audience the complex actions of his characters within a spatial and temporal framework. The basis of my reconstruction has been the verbal signposts, especially deictic markers ("left," "right," "now," "later," "near," "far") used by the narrator and his characters as well as certain other narrative devices (perfective and imperfective verb forms, similes) that effect transitions from one sector of the action to another. The results have demonstrated a surprising degree of consistency and coherence in Homer's visualization of the Iliadic landscape.

That landscape is envisaged in a manner that differs from the modern conception of geographical space or "cartographical space" that is homogeneous and isotropic (cf. Janni 1984: 85 and Gehrke 1998: 163–92). A map with its grid and points and uniform scale "objectifies" space and abstracts from the viewer's perspective. In a frequently cited example, Hera makes her way from Olympus to Lemnos, not as the crow flies—even though her feet do not touch the ground—but as a journey whose itinerary starts from Olympus, proceeds via Pieria and Emathia to the mountains of Thrace, then to Athos, whence it continues "by sea" (ἐπὶ πόντον, 14.229) to Lemnos (14. 225–30).

This hodological conception of space (i.e., from the perspective of a traveler) has nothing primitive about it nor is it limited to oral traditions. Despite our widespread reliance on maps, hodological descriptions still dominate our every-day life. In an experiment involving the translation of cognitive material into language, a group of New Yorkers were asked to describe their apartments. These descriptions took two forms: most (97%) recounted a tour, which resembles an itinerary, but only 3% of the participants described their apartments in cartographic terms (Linde and Labov 1975: 924–39; cf. Brown 1995: 118). Also—and I find this particularly intriguing—when speakers had to double back to an earlier point in their tour—say, a central corridor—we might have expected them to reverse right and left relative to their position when they began the tour. It turned out, however, that left and right orientation was invariably retained from the perspective from which the apartment was originally entered. Such fixed points of references are reminiscent of the *Iliad*'s constant orientation in battlefield descriptions where left and right, as we have seen, are always plotted from the Greek perspective.

In a classic study of the cognitive mapping of urban landscapes, Kevin Lynch attempted to define the way urban spaces are defined and perceived by their inhabitants (Lynch 1960: 46–90; see also Downs and Stea 1977). In the mental maps constructed by his interviewees, certain urban features became prominent while others seemed to recede into the background. Such prominent characteristics included what Lynch called paths, landmarks, districts, edges, and nodes. While distances and many details were ignored, these defining features seemed to remain fairly constant. Our own experience of our local environment confirms Lynch's findings. Although Homer's Trojan theater constitutes an imagined landscape, it nevertheless possesses defining features, analogous to those singled out by Lynch, that allow his auditors to visualize and follow the progress of the action on the battlefield.

We must also remember that the space constructed within the poem is a peculiarly marked landscape, one in which space can be defined as Greek or Trojan, but also in terms of contested areas where these labels are shifting according to the tide of battle.²⁰ Between the walls of Troy and the Greek camp, there are two lines of demarcation: first, as we have seen, the wall protecting the Greek camp, so prominent in Books 12–17; second, a line dividing the Trojan plain traced by the river Scamander. If the fighting around the Greek wall and trench serves to demonstrate that the Greeks are on the defensive,

²⁰ Cf. Thornton 1984: 150–61 and her “map” of the *Iliad*'s action on page 51. I am happy to acknowledge E. Minchin's forthcoming paper, “‘And she went in a flash of speed down from the pinnacles of Olympus . . .’: Spatial Memory and the Composition of the *Iliad*,” which she generously shared with me.

then combat focusing on the Scamander shows a similarly defensive posture on the part of the Trojans. The course of the Scamander also seems to flow past Troy and to continue “to the left of the battle,” where, when needed, it forms a secondary arena of combat or even a place to park inactive warriors.²¹ The ford of the Scamander constitutes a node between the two sectors of the Trojan plain; Hector is evacuated to it after he is wounded (14. 433); Achilles chases the Trojans there as they flee to the city (21.1); and Priam crosses it when he returns from Achilles’ camp (24. 692–93).

The plain before Troy is dappled with several significant landmarks. Some tumuli cannot be located with any precision because they are not so much markers of action as emblems of the ancestral possession of the landscape by the Trojans themselves. Significantly, the tomb of Ilos, the eponymous founder of Ilium, located between the river and the walls of Troy, is the most frequently mentioned and clearly within Trojan control. The flight of the Trojans in Book 11. 166–70 offers a sequential parade of landmarks: the tumulus of Ilos, which lies μέσσον κατὰ πεδίον; then the fig tree, which must be near the walls (cf. 6. 433, 22. 145); and finally the Skaian Gates and the oak nearby (cf. 6. 237, 9. 354, 21. 545–549). The walls of Troy are pierced by two named gates: the Skaian Gate, which has a central vantage over the plain; and the Dardanian. The distortions of distance and perspective in the *Iliad* correspond to those observed by Lynch’s respondents and are those of a landscape subjectively perceived and inhabited in the mind’s eye of the poet who guides us.

MEMORY

As has often been noted, Homeric epic uses spatial vocabulary to describe its own narrative. *Oimê* and *oimos* both seem to refer to the “path” of song (Becker 1937: 68–100; Ford 1992: 40–48; and Thornton 1984: 148–49):

Μοῦσ’ ἄρ’ ἀοιδὸν ἀνήκεν ἀειδέμεναι κλέα ἀνδρῶν,
οἴμης τῆς τότε ἄρα κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἵκανε.

The Muse sent the bard on his way to sing the *klea andron*
From the *oimê* whose fame at that time reached the very heaven.

(*Od.* 8.73–74)

²¹ The course of the Scamander has long elicited special controversy. Homer places it both between Troy and the Greek ships *and* to the left of the battle. Interpreters have chosen to accept one or the other of these indications. It is, however, not difficult to accept both: the Scamander crosses the Trojan plain and then continues leftward toward the sea. Pace Elliger 1975: 45n7 and 48–51.

Phemius claims that the Muse has put into his heart οὔμας παντοίας (cf. H. Hermes 451: οὔμος ἀοιδῆς). Demodocus is “sent on his way” or “on the path” (ἀνῆκεν) by the Muse. The verb used in many invocations, ἐννέπω, instructs the Muse to “pursue” or “follow” the subject of the epic (e.g. ἄνδρα, *Od.* 1.1; or the enumeration of the Greek host in the Catalogue of Ships). The *path* (*oimē*) of song, then, constitutes a sequence of events to be followed, constructed as an itinerary in the mind’s eye, one with various stopping places (scenes or episodes) that are visualized in the course of the narrative.

Further evidence for a kind of spatial mnemonics has been recognized in the Catalogue of Ships, which forms an itinerary, or more accurately, three distinct itineraries that cover a good part of Greece. For our purposes, the catalogue of Trojans and their allies, although lacking in detail and mythological content, is of equal interest. For after what appears to be a circular tour around the Troad, the enumeration of the allied contingents forms four spokes that emanate from Troy and end at points most distant from Ilium (cf. Kirk 1985: 248–63). While sparse on particulars, especially to the east, this configuration likewise constructs four different itineraries through Asia Minor.

Now, this procedure resembles nothing so much as the art of mnemonics involving *loci* whose invention is usually attributed to the poet Simonides. The story, cited by Cicero and Quintilian among others, recounts how Simonides was commissioned to compose an epinician in honor of a boxer (Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.86.352–54; Quintilian 11.2.11–16; cf. Phaedrus 4.24 and La Fontaine, *Fables* 1.14). Upon delivery of the ode at a banquet, his patron was displeased because the poet had devoted more attention to celebrating the Dioscuri than to the victor; so let the divine twins pay. Later, during the symposium, two young men came to the door and advised Simonides to leave the building. Straightway, the house collapses and all within are crushed to death. The poet is able to identify the corpses that had become unrecognizable by recalling where they sat at the banquet hall.

The discipline of mnemonics outlined in the rhetorical handbooks requires substantial training and practice. But it is worth emphasizing that Simonides’ anecdote requires no such demanding discipline. If I asked you to list the objects in your living room, you would likewise visualize that space and “see” the various pieces of furniture, paintings, and knickknacks, by mentally going around the room. This process involves two steps: first, the mental imaging of a space, whether familiar or constructed in the mind’s eye, and then the association of the different places in your apartment or a palace or a theater with specific items. You then take a mental walk through those places to retrieve them.

The Simonidean anecdote merely makes explicit a technique already exploited in Homeric epic, a technique whose importance for both the construction of the poet's narrative and for rendering it comprehensible to his audience should not be underestimated. We have seen how the configuration of the Achaean Wall constitutes a memory theater that structures the action throughout Book 12 and allows both poet and audience to track the three assaults on the fortification. But Simonides' configuration of the participants at a symposium and Homer's vision of the theater of Troy share not only a mnemonic technique that allows the re-visualization of objects in space: on a deeper level, they both recognize the memorializing function of poetry (cf. Goldmann 1989: 43–66). Saved on account of his piety, Simonides nevertheless performed a critical service for his patrons: by remembering their seating arrangements, he was able to identify their corpses and thus ensure their proper burial and memorialization through their *semata*. This act likewise displayed the poet's piety.

In the *Iliad*, the Greek fortifications had been built in Book 7 at Nestor's suggestion under the cover of a truce to bury the dead and construct a tomb. The wall's rather strange double function is noteworthy, for its future disappearance will signal the passing of the heroic race, the *hemitheon genos andron* (12. 23), a unique expression that views the heroes retrospectively as a vanished race. Nevertheless, the *kleos* of the wall, like the *kleos* of the heroes, will endure through—and solely through—the medium of poetry. Significantly, their tomb will be a cenotaph, for as Nestor says in a notorious Homeric crux, the bones of the heroes will be returned to their children at home. They will leave no trace on the plain of Troy. Their *sema*, like the wall, exists only in words. Likewise, our window to the world of the *Iliad* with all its brilliance and vividness depends on the poet's words; like the Achaean wall, we cannot find it on a map, for it exists uniquely in the bard's performance. The great central day of battle takes place under its shadow.

It seems altogether appropriate that the discovery of mnemonics should be linked to the memorializing of the dead. A *sema*, as Greg Nagy has shown, must first be recognized and then interpreted, which is signified by *noein*; not to notice or to misapprehend a *sema* is expressed by the verb *lanthano*—whose usual antonym is *mimnesko* (Nagy 1990: 202–222; cf. Bakker 2005: 150–53 and Scodel 2002: 99–116). The Iliadic landscape, as we have seen, is likewise littered with *semata* that constitute landmarks on the Trojan plain; Throughout the *Iliad*, the heroes are obsessed with their *semata* as concrete forms of remembrance after death. Indeed, the poem as a whole can rightly be considered a *sema* actualized in the poet's memory and activated in the poet's performance. The memory of the poet, his vision of the landscape on

which his heroes fought and died, and the arrangement of his path of song that narrates their deeds are likewise acts of piety.

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